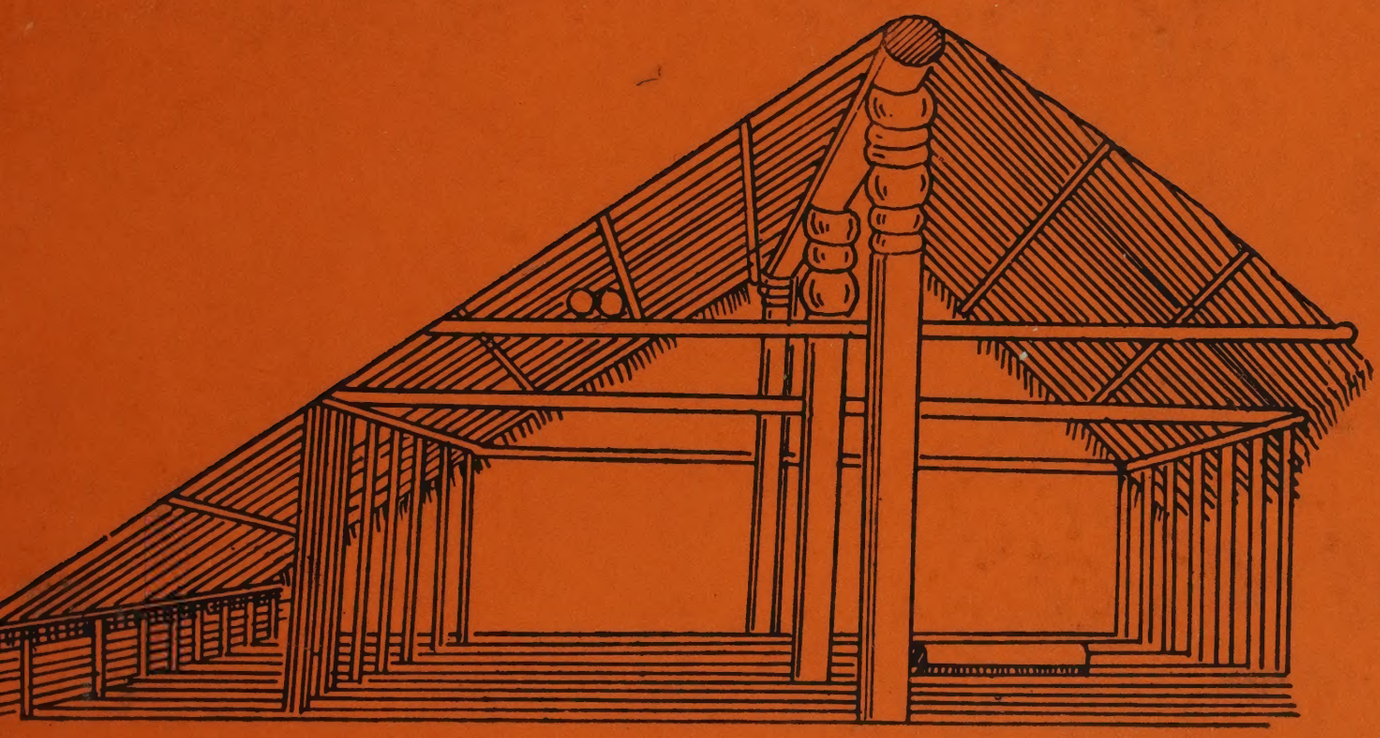
The Lalung Society

A THEME FOR ANALYTICAL ETHNOGRAPHY



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In preparing this book for publication encouragement and help have been received from many quarters which are appreciated with a deep sense of gratitude.

The previous Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, late Dr. D. K. Sen took special interest in this and visited one of the fields of research in March, 1966. In course of writing Dr. S. C. Sinha, the present Director of this Survey, took the trouble of going through some of the chapters and spoke encouragingly.

To Shri Ful Singh Lalung of Nellie and Shri Bhujendra Singh Deka-raja of Baropujia, thanks are due for bringing into notice historical background of the Lalungs.

Various aspects of the Khasi and the Garo societies were explained to the senior author by Shri B. E. Nongrum and Shri S. A. Marak respectively. Shri S. K. Biswas, formerly of this Survey, supplemented certain quantitative information on the Lalung of Amswoi. Thanks to them for all these helps. To Shri B. Das Shastri, an erudite scholar and Indologist, indebtedness is expressed for his critical and evaluating remarks on the subject-matter of this book as it was being written. Shri P. K. Mitra did a good job on the photographs that appear in this book.

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FOREWORD

In 1955-56 a series of ethnographic studies on little known tribal groups were taken up by the Anthropological Survey of India. One of the major emphasis of these studies was that data should be collected on the basis of intensive functional study of a village community dominated by the ethnic group under observation. Shri M. M. Das, Senior Technical Assistant of the Survey, attached to the Northeast India Station, collected detailed data on the Lalung from the village of Nambor under the guidance of Shri N. K. Syamchaudhuri. In developing the analytical frame for writing the report Shri Syamchaudhuri has brought in a wide ethnographic canvas which include comparative information on the Khasi and the Garo. It is hoped that this analytical ethnography on a little known community of Assam will be of interest both for theoretical social anthropologists as well as for the planners and administrators.

Surajit Sinha

INTRODUCTION

Assam has been fortunate in having a number of ethnographers and anthropologists such as Mills, Hutton, Gurdon, Endle, Shakespear, Haimendorf, Das and Burling, to name a few, to take interest in and write monographs on its different communities.

The present is an attempt at continuing the chain, though from a different angle.

For three years from 1959 the official duty of the senior author took him to the various parts of Assam. It was in the course of those tours that he came to know about the Lalungs and it was then that the idea was concieved of writing about them.

The framework of the book is ethnographic, but the theme has been handled from an angle different from the monographs written so far.

The structure of the Lalung society has been described in detail, comparing it with those of the Khasis on the one hand and of the Garos on the other. In the analysis of the materials, the roles and functions of the important kins and the philosophy that lies behind the social structure have been discussed.

The economic and the religious aspects of the Lalung culture for instance have been described from the point of social involvement that is these have been viewed as parts of a whole social organization. In short, the ethnographic data have been analysed through the mode of participation by the human elements constituting the society.

No society is static. It is natural that the original culture of the Lalungs has undergone changes in the course of its evolution. To give an idea of this dynamism their culture has been placed against the historical background of Assam. The changes that have taken place and are taking place have also been discussed.

This book is thus an analytical approach to the study of Lalung life and culture, through a method in which the social aspects of human participation have been emphasised. In this

sense it is holistic. But this holism has been viewed in terms of relation of the human participants to the society, culture and environment.

At the same time the study is not merely an appraisal of problem and method of presentation, but has a theoretical construct behind it. The Lalung society has its own structure and in-group consciousness or corporateness. It will be noticed that the Lalungs have always maintained a distinct existence as a distinct society through all the varied historical situations which were enough for their disintegration had not a strong feeling of cohesion held them together. Not only they withstood these disruptive forces but even inducted people from outside into their own society. This cohesion has developed into a philosophy of continuity of life which is reflected in their social structure and village organization.

Change has in the modern times started knocking at their doors with a greater force then ever before. But the integrity and internal economic bonds still resist these influences and hold the society together.

The view taken here is that all the phases of Lalung life, social organization, economy and religion, constitute a systematic whole of human relationships which may be called in-group consciousness or social corporateness. This basic theoretical construct lies behind the problem of inter-structural link up of social structure, economy, religion and method of its treatment.

Though the main purpose of this book is one of method and analysis of ethnographic data, the experts interested in the problems of applied anthropology would, it is hoped, find in the treatment of the Lalung economy and village administration certain emerging problems of development and leadership to be reckoned with today.

Efforts have been made throughout to write both for the social scientists and those who are interested in the history and culture of north-east India. It brings to the latter in a general way information on a society till now but little known. If however the scientists discover in the presentation and analysis something of interest the labour put in this monograph would be more than amply rewarded.

THE LALUNG SOCIETY

A theme for analytical ethnography

MEMOIR No. 31

CHAPTER ONE

DISTRIBUTION AND ECOLOGY

The Lalungs are mainly a plains tribe of Assam. They are found in considerable strength in the southwestern tract of the Nowgong district. Roughly, this area can be included within a primeter traced out with a line drawn along the northern peripheries of the thanas[1] of Jamunamukh, Roha and Marigaon, across the Kamrup district, finally, terminating at the confines of the Khasi Hills. Beyond this area, concentrations of the Lalungs thin out gradually. They are fairly found to the north of the river Brahmaputra and to the east of Nowgong. On the west, they extend into the Kamrup district, mainly confined in the thana of Gauhati. In the south, they are found in the Mikir Hills and a little beyond in the Jaintia Hills.

They are found also in isolated pockets in certain places far away from their principal habitat. On the north bank of the Brahmaputra, some Lalungs are living in the western part of the Lakhimpur district. Similarly, on its southern bank in the district of Sibsagar, there is a settlement near Titabor.

These distant distributions away from their homeland probably resulted in the past, when the Ahoms rose into power. In course of the extension of their control over the central Assam since the 13th Century A.D., the Ahoms came in conflict with the Lalungs over a wide area, now constituted under the Nowgong district. They subjugated the Lalungs and it was likely that as a measure of punishment some Lalung chiefs and their adherents were transported and settled in those far away places of upper Assam.

The Lalungs of Baligaon, a village in the Dhemaji mouza[2] of the North Lakhimpur sub-division, have certain clans, namely, Hukai, Kholar, Amsi and Mithi, in common with their compatriots in the villages of Baropujia and Nambor in the Nowgong district. In the Ahom chronicles, there are indications of settling conquered communities in widely dispersed places away from their original habitats.

The homeland of the Lalungs, which can be geographically defined as consisting of contiguous parts of the Nowgong and Kamrup districts and the hills to the south of them, is not

homogenous in ethnic composition and ecology. In Nowgong the Lalungs, being about 12% of the total population, are not numerically significant compared to the mass formed of other communities such as the Koch, Kaibartta, Kachari, Nath and the Muslims. But they are the most predominant among the tribal groups. In the census of 1961, out of the total tribal strength of 87,538 in the Nowgong district 54,797, that is about 63%, were returned as Lalung. As an ethnic group, they have retained to a large measure their cultural identity. Mostly they have separate villages where they live with a strong sense of ingroup consciousness. Even in multi-ethnic villages they occupy more or less exclusive living areas.

Territorial separation of settlements between the rural communities is common in the villages of Assam. Such spatial exclusiveness limits inter-group communications on the social level. In this multi-ethnic and segmented social environment, the Lalungs, notwithstanding their small number, have been able to live in their own cultural world.

As in the plains, in the hills lying to the south of the Nowgong district, they are not demographically significant. Here the Mikirs are dominant, the Lalungs only constituting about 18% of the total population of 39,076 according to the census returns of 1951. But like their compatriots in the plains they have retained their homogenity and territorial exclusiveness, inhabting separate villages.

On the south bank of the Brahmaputra, the Lalungs are the only tribe, who are distributed more in the plains than in the hills. In this respect, they are comparable to the Miris who are not only found in the riverine tract to the northeast but also extend to the contiguous cis-Himalayan region.

In the early census records, the Lalungs were considered akin to the great Bodo linguistic group of Assam. But their demographic entity has always been treated separately.

Table showing Lalung population

Year	Return	Year	Return
1872	34,859	1921	41,033
1881	47,650	1931	43,448
1891	52,423	1941	51,308
1901	35,513	1951	52,352
1911	39,219	1961	61,315

Since the first census taken in 1872, the Lalungs maintained a steady growth for about three decades. In this period, they increased from thirtyfour to fiftyfour thousand. But in the next decade, they declined by seventeen thousand. This sudden decrease in the population was ascribed to the toll of lives taken by the Kal-Azar epidemic. In the census of 1911, an increase of four thousand was recorded but in spite of this momentum, the rate of their growth has not remained uniform during the last fifty years. Between 1911 and 1931, the Lalungs increased almost uniformly from 5% to 6% in each decennial period, but during 1931 and 1941, a sharp rise of about 18% was recorded. In the next decade, the rate of increase declined to 2%. But in the last census, it suddenly leaped to 17%. These demographic vagaries cannot be explained off-hand. They are partly attributable to certain cultural shifts taking place in the Lalung society for a very long time. Through their age-long association with the Hindu rural masses, a large number of Lalungs have been absorbed in the larger frame-work of Vaishnavism propounded by the Assamese saint Shri Sankar Deb. It began to spread among the plains tribes of Assam since the fifteenth century.

In the hills, the Lalungs have not been uniformly represented in the various decennial censuses. In the western part of the Mikir and the North Cachar Hills, which is the homeland of the hill Lalungs, their number was returned in the census of 1951 as 2,176 only. Further south, in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills their census figures were recorded in 1891 and 1951 as 1505 and 298 respectively. In the other censuses, they were not distinguished from the predominant tribes, namely, the Mikirs and the Syntengs of those areas.

The habitat of the Lalungs can be divided into two ecological areas, one of which is the western part of the Mikir Hills, comprising the Baithalangso thana. It is economically and topographically different from the other region, that is, the plains of Nowgong. A small number of Lalung, about 20% of their total population, live in these hills. Their villages are situated on elevations ranging between six and nine hundred meters. From June to September, the weather remains very wet, low clouds passing over them. The hills are thickly wooded. In the winter months, from November to February, there is very little rainfall. The nights are cold but nowhere the temparature touches the freezing point. The hills near the villages where

crops are grown become extremely dry. Habitations are located primarily on two factors. The most important one is the proximity to perennial water sources. At the same time owing to high humidity and rainfall, they should be on the open hill tops where light of the sun will not be obstructed.

These hills form a natural watershed to the plains south of it. On the sloping surfaces, a number of streams take their courses, to form into big rivers at the foothills, and flow across the plains to the Brahmaputra. Two of them, namely, Kopili and Killing, carry high discharges, sometimes menacingly, in every monsoon.

The upper reaches of the rivers Umiam, Borpani and Kopili, are suitable for growing rice by irrigation. The Lalung villages in these hills are located in places where wet paddy is grown by tapping water from the natural declivity. But there is another method of cultivation. It is the shifting cultivation. On high slopes where irrigation is not possible crops like cotton, sesum, castor, chilli, vegetable and paddy, that can thrive on the rain only, are grown. In March, new plots are cleared by cutting and burning the vegetation that has grown on them. After the April showers, hoeing is done and seeds are broadcast. Cotton is always grown on separate plots. But once a plot has been cultivated, it is not used again in the next season. It is kept fallow and sown again after three years.

A typical village of this type of mixed economy is Amswoi, situated in the hills about twenty-eight kilometers south of Nelli, a trading centre in the southwestern corner of the Nowgong district. It has a population of 326, divided into sixty-eight families. The settlement area and arable lands of the village are topographically distinguishable. The houses are built on a fairly big knoll, overlooking a tiny valley on the east, where paddy is grown by irrigation. The entire area is somewhat like a basin that receives rain water from the hills on the north, east and south. A small stream, called Umswoi, flows southwest through it.

But the quantity of rice grown on the wet land in Amswoi does not meet all its demands. It supplements its needs by shifting cultivation. Though paddy is grown both on the high slopes and the wet valley land, the variety grown on the latter is important as it is the main staple crop. For growing the wet paddy, the field is divided into small plots, enclosed by embankments for holding water tapped from the streams. The ripe paddy

is reaped between late October and November and stored in the living house.

Similar mixed cultivation is practised also in the other Lalung villages similarly situated on ranges not higher than 900 meters on the average. This economic complex has grown through the exploitation of two types of lands. Cultivation of wet rice on irrigated fields limits the scope of the shifting agriculture on the higher hills, for working periods of both largely overlap. As such one cannot go far from one's village to cultivate lands in different places. In Amswoi, shifting cultivation is, therefore, done on the hill-slopes where monsoon water cannot be tapped for irrigation. But such land is limited near the village. All jungle patches are not brought under cultivation for timber, bamboo, cane and thatching grass have to be grown for domestic and economic use. Hence, a plot once cultivated is not kept fallow for more than two years.

In the plains, the Lalungs share the common economy of settled cultivation with the non-tribal communities. As in the hills, their staple crop is rice grown in the wet land ; but the method of cultivation is different.

In the settlement pattern, there are environmental differences. In the hills, dwelling houses are built on high knoll. Every house has a small patch of kitchen garden, and a courtyard well protected on all sides with bamboo stakes. The living house has a rectangular ground plan with thatched gabled roof on the top. The door is at the end overlooking the courtyard.

In the plains, the domicile is built flanking a wide path, but it consists of two or three huts. Usually, the householder builds separate huts for living, cooking and storing. The living hut is rectangular in plan and has gabled roof, but it opens, unlike the hill dwelling house, on a verandah built along one of the sides. In front of the entrance, one finds a large courtyard. The granary is built nearby, in a corner, so that it lies in sight from the living house. It is good luck if one sees his granary the first thing as one comes out of the house in the morning.

Though the two regions are distinct topographically, economic relation between them has existed from a very long time past. Regular trading has been carried on at certain established centres, namely, Nelli, Khola, Gova, Dharamtul and Jamunamukh, where the hill people come to sell their produce

such as cotton, sesum and lac and to purchase their necessities, specially salt and earthenware made by non-tribal potters. The distance between those places and the remote Lalung villages in the hills were covered on foot in one day or two.

The rate of growth among the plains Lalungs appears to be higher than that of their hill compatriots. Demographic data collected from Nambor, a plains village, compared with that of Amswoi show that while in the former the average size of family is 7.83, in the latter it is 4.70.

In spite of the ecological differences between the hills and the plains, the main stay of the Lalung agriculture is paddy. This similarly could be taken as an indication that the Lalungs have carried to the hills the economy of wet rice. But this eco-cultural question cannot be evaluated duly without looking into their ethnological and historical background. From their geographical distribution, it may be concluded that they occupy an intermediate position between the peoples of two distinct cultures, those of the Kacharis of the plains and the Khasi tribes living south and east of them in the hills.

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[1] Thana is the smallest territorial unit in home administration of the Indian Union.

[2] A revenue division of land.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hamilton in his account of Assam between 1908 and 1914 mentioned that certain Garo chiefs lived in the plains near the borders of Jaintia State. They retained their ancient customs but paid tribute to the king of Jaintia, who was by birth a Garo (Hamilton 1940 : 84). It was probable that the informants from whom he collected the materials for compilation did not distinguish between the Lalungs and the Garos, as they have many similarities in language and culture.

On linguistic evidence, the Lalungs have been classified with the Bodos or the Kacharis of Assam. In fact, their language is more closely connected with the Dimasa branch of the Bodo people. Dr. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* states that in 1891 thede were forty thousand Lalung speakers in Nowgong, Kamrup and Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In Nowgong, they have a tradition that their ancestors came from the Jaintia Hills, in the reign of the Jaintia Raja U-Mon Gohain. Another account also says that the Lalungs were the autochthones of the Jaintia Hills (Grierson 1903 : 49).

The Lalungs call themselves *Tiwa,* which in their language means the people who were lifted from below. Lalung is a Mikir word, formed of two parts, *lang* and *lung,* with separate meanings. Lang is water, and lung means to sink in it. These two words have been compounded into *Lalung*. Some Mikirs are distributed in the same region with the Lalungs but in the plains they are not as numerous as the latter. There is a Lalung tale how the Mikirs came to distinguish the Lalungs as the people who were drowned in water and were rescued by them.

The story goes that during the invasion of Assam by the Man (Burmese) the Lalungs were driven from the eastern part of their habitat in the plains towards the Kolong river in the Nowgong district. In their attempt to cross it, they were drawned in the river. The Mikirs who were also there helped them to get out and cross the river. After this incident, the Mikirs started calling them *lang-lung*, which later on was shortened into Lalung.

This account cannot be very old. The Burmese invasion of Assam lasted about eleven years ending in 1827 with the treaty

of Yandabo. But it indicates that in the plains the Mikirs and the Lalungs lived together for a considerable time, though the former tribe is notably different from the latter in language and social organisation.

Certain accounts connect the Lalungs with Hindu traditions and myths. There is a belief that the original language of the Lalungs was Sanskrit and they are Kshatriyas, the Hindu caste of warriors and kings. When Parasurama set out to destroy all the Kshatriyas to avenge the death of his father at the hand of a king named Sahasrabahu Arjuna, the Lalungs decided to go to hiding and escaped to the Lailung Hill, which was somewhere in the north of the Brahmaputra. They stopped speaking Sanskrit and discarded the sacred thread they had been putting on like other Kshatriyas. They lived many centuries in the Lailung Hills in disguise, eventually forgetting their original traditions and language. As a result, when they returned to their own land they were not recognised as Kshatriyas, but came to be known as Lalung after the Lailung Hill where they had lived so long.

In another story, their origin is attributed to the god Mahadev, one of the Holy Trinity of the Hindus. One day Mahadev fell into a deep sleep after taking a huge quantity of *laupani* (rice-beer). Saliva rolled down from both sides of his mouth. Since pure things coming out of the body of a god may not be wasted, a man and a woman were born of this. They were the first Lalung couple. Tradition also has that as the Lalungs were born from the mouth of Mahadev, they were endowed with the capacity of keeping in memory their songs and lore.

There is a popular lore among the Lalungs that their forefathers were the soldiers of one Jongal Balahu, who was very brave and mighty. He was the son of Arimatta, an ancient king of Assam. His power was so great that the Ahom king, who was ruling in upper Assam, was afraid of him and planned to kill him. The king made a show of friendship to hide his design. He proposed to give one of his daughters to Jongal Balahu who agreed to marry and became the king's son-in-law.

When the princess visited her father after marriage, he told her to steal the sword of Jongal Balahu and to send it to him concealed in the stomach of a big fish. When the daughter returned to her husband, the king sent a request to Jongal Balahu for a big fish. Jongal Balahu told his wife about her

father's desire and asked her to fulfil it. She got a big fish, hid the sword of Jongal Balahu in its belly and sent it to her father. Immediately the king received the fish, he declared war against his son-in-law.

On hearing this, Jongal Balahu told his wife to prepare and serve food quickly, as he could fight best when he was not hungry. His sword had magical power and he was confident of victory. The wife feigned to cook rice while she put stone chips in her pot. Jongal Balahu became impatient as his wife was late in serving food. He went to see and found her cooking stone. He was so infuriated at this that he killed her with a kick and went to get his sword, but it was missing from the sheath. The soldiers of the king were fast approaching ; so he set off to fight them with the scabbard of his sword only. After a heroic battle, Jongal Balahu became very tired and went to drink water from the Kolong river, but he was pursued and killed at a place called Kajolimukh.

Besides these, there is yet another popular belief among the Lalungs that the oldest place where they lived is Helem, in the eastern part of the Darrang district. After they had lived there for centuries, disputes arose between them and their neighbours, the Bodos. Eventually, they left that place. The memories of association with Helem is often expressed in popular songs. On festive occasions, many songs are sung preceded and followed by some common refrains like *laili helali lai*. The meaning of these words is obscure, but the educated Lalungs take them as reminiscences of their past links with Helem.

In the course of their journey, the Lalungs crossed to the south bank of the Brahmaputra and settled at Charaideo. At this place, they did not live long as factional disputes broke out among them. They left Charaideo to be occupied by the Chutias, a separate tribe, but with whom they claim to have many similarities.

They migrated southwest by the fringes of the Mikir Hills and entered the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Here they settled at a place called Khyrim and lived many years under the king of Jaintia. Again, disputes arose among them. As a result of this, a large number went north to the plains of Nowgong. Two views are prevalent in this connexion. One version is that the Lalungs quarrelled with the Jaintias as their kings used to immolate human beings at the altar of the Goddess Kali. Those

who were afraid of being killed in this way, left the territory of the king and settled in the plains. The other version is that Lalung clans had a dispute among themselves, on the right of selecting their king. Every clan wanted to have the king selected from it. There was no agreement on it, so certain clans moved down to the plains, and settled in two groups.

When the Lalungs were going away from the Jaintia Hills, the king of Jaintia sent his men to bring them back. The king's men met the Lalungs near a river at the foot of the Mikir Hills and asked them not to leave the country. They set barriers on the path, but the Lalungs were determined not to go back and demonstrated their firmness by cutting a pumpkin in round sections. They did it to show that they could no longer live with the Jaintias. It is a custom among the Lalungs not to cut the pumpkin in round sections if they want to eat it. Some of them do not eat it even. And there are others who would not enter any house having pumpkin vine on the roof.

Of the two groups of Lalung emigrants, one consisted of seven clans and the other only of five. This traditional grouping is found among the Lalungs living in the plains. The common belief in this respect is that the clans of the bigger group established seven principalities, namely, Nelli, Khola, Gova, Mayang, Monoha, Ghoga and Kumai, each headed by a king under the Ahom. Similarly, the other clans were also formed into separate feudatory units, known as Khora, Khaigar, Mikir, Baropujia and Topakuchi.

Except Gova all these petty States lost power with the decline of the Ahom rule in the early 19th century. The Bohagi fair held at Baropujia and Gova, the two old Lalung villages in western Nowgong reminds one of the authority once exercised by the Lalung royal houses.

This is an annual event which comes off on an appointed day in the Assamese month of Bohag and hence is called Bohagi. Articles such as sword, shield, throne and pieces of attire, which were used by the kings, are carried to the fair in palanquins. At Baropujia, the things of the five royal houses are brought separately from the different villages where the kings had ruled. This is done by the members of the particular clans, to which these kings belonged.

The palanquins are carried by the men of Lorom clan, as it was their traditional duty. Villagers accompany the royal

bearers in procession to the fair and as they go some men precede the palanquins and put up mock fights by brandishing swords and shields all along the way. The fair assembles in the morning on an open ground. Each royal palanquin is placed under a separate shed made of bamboo and thatch. But the royal articles are not allowed to be seen until devotional songs have been sung in front of the palanquins by the clansmen in honour of their bygone kings.

The fair lasts for seven days. But the royal palanquins are taken every evening to the villages at sunset and carried again to the fair the next morning. People are not allowed to go close to them, but they may see the things from a distance marked out by fences. In the old days, certain clans were debarred from having audience with the kings. They were allowed to see their kings in State only in the Bohagi fair every year.

The traditional accounts of the origin and migrations of the Lalungs are of two kinds. The mythological stories connect them with the large framework of the Hindu society, while the others have some historical import. According to the chronicles (*buranjis*) of Assam, Jongal Balahu was one of the two sons of Arimatta. Remains of an old fort with high embankment known as Jongalgorh situated in the Shahari mauza of the Nowgong district is said to have been the capital of Jongal Balahu (Gait 1963 : 19).

Arimatta has been historically identified with Vaidyadeva. His conquests extended up to upper Assam where he had two capitals, namely, Visvanath and Ratnapura. The royal house established by Arimatta or Vaidyadeva ruled in Assam for about six decades from 1138 A.D. (Choudhury 1959 : 270-75).

It appears from the traditional chronicles and copper-plate grants issued by the ancient kings of Assam that they were Hindus. The valley of the Brahmaputra over which they ruled before the rise of the Ahom power in the 13th century A.D. was largely inhabited by Bodo tribes. The Dimasas, the eastern branch of the Bodos, were dominant in central Assam. It is very likely that the Lalungs, who are linguistically closely related to the Dimasas were also distributed on both sides of the Brahmaputra along with them. The traditions that the Lalung lived at Helem, and that Jongal Balahu was their hero may not be entirely devoid of historical value.

The chronicles (*buranjis*) of the Ahom indicate that in the southwest of the Subansiri and Disang rivers there were small, but more or less independent, States of the Kacharis, who were none but the Dimasas. It is apparent that the Lalungs were not separately mentioned in the early period of the chronicles because of their linguistic and cultural affinity with the Dimasas. The distribution of the Lalungs even to the present day is not inconsistent with their legends of origin and migration. Authentic historical evidence of independent Lalung principalities are not many. Dimorua was an ancient Lalung State in the southwest of Nowgong. It was more or less independent till the 15th century. Its royal house claimed that it belonged to the line of Narak the earliest legendry king of Assam. In later times, Dimorua and other Lalung chiefdoms, namely, Gova, Baropujia, Khola and Nelli came under the Ahom or the Jaintia kings. That several Lalung principalities flourished from time to time either under the Ahom or the Jaintia kings are founded on reliable records. It is therefore necessary to give a brief account of the relations the Lalungs had with the Jaintias and the Ahoms.

The Jaintia State formerly consisted of twenty-two chiefdoms, of which twelve were in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the rest in the plains of Nowgong to the north and in Sylhet to the south. In the administration, the king depended on his chiefs, leaving them to decide disputes and to maintain law and order according to local customs. The royal house of the State was matrilineal, the sisters' son inheriting the throne.

The history of formation of the Jaintia State is obscure, but it is mentioned in the Puranic and the Trantic literature as containing one of the fifty-one sacred signs of Durga (Gait 1963 : 311). The royal house believed in the Sakta cult of the Hindu religion and practised human sacrifice. The chronological history of the Jaintia State goes back to the early 16th century, to one king called Parbat Ray. At that time, the seat of the king was probably at Narthiang, now included in the Jowai sub-division of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. From that place, the capital was shifted to Jaintiapur in the plans to the south in the middle of the 16th century, probably due to the gradual extension of the Ahom rule in the plains of Assam. But historical contacts between the Jaintia and the other contemporary powers of Assam dates from the early 16th century, when the Koch king Naranarayan sent an expedition to annex the Jaintia State under his general Chila Ray. The first attack was

made on a tributory chief of the Jaintia king in the Lalung land bordering the hills, and subsequently on the Jaintia State.

In 1647, the king of Jaintia captured an Ahom trader. The Ahom king retaliated by arresting a number of Jaintia traders. As a result of this estrangement trade in the Lalung markets between the two States remained suspended for eight years.

In 1658, Pramata Rai revolted against his grandfather Jasamantha Rai the king of Jaintia, and sought help from the Lalung chief of Gova but was refused. The prince, annoyed at this, destroyed four Lalung villages. The chief of Gova asked for help from Jayadhawaj Singh, the Ahom king. He gave protection to the Lalung chief by settling him, with his seven hundred men in Khagarijan, a place which more or less corresponds to the modern town of Nowgong (Gait 1963 : 128-29).

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Jaintia king Dhanamanik came in conflict with Prabhakar, the chief of Dimorua, who ruled over a small state inhabited by Lalungs to the east of Gova. On an appeal from him, Satrudaman, the king of Cachar, came to his aid but was himself defeated.

Since then the suzerainty of the Jaintia kings over the Lalung chiefdoms in the plains appears to have continued till 1707, when the Ahoms began to dominate the scene. In a conflict, the Jaintias captured Tamradhawaj, the king of Cachar, who was a vassal of the Ahom king Rudra Singh. Two generals were ordered by him to march to Jaintiapur, the capital of Jaintia State. One of them proceeded from the plains of Nowgong and sent words to the Jaintia king, through the Lalung chief of Gova, to surrender the captive but the king of Jaintia, Ram Singh declined to do so. The Ahoms retaliated by closing the market at Gova where trade was carried between the hills and the plains, but conciliated its chief and established a base camp for making war on the Jaintias. The fight between the two States was severe, the Jaintia king being defeated and humiliated. His subjects were killed and their villages destroyed. In the rampage, it appears that many hill Lalungs were taken to the plains as prisoners.

In the Ahom chronicles (*buranjis*), it is mentioned that the Lalung chiefs (*Rajas*) in the plains joined the army sent to the Jaintia State. One of the two expeditionary forces as it proceeded from northeast happened to pass through a hill named Hajo-Lalung. It is, therefore, evident that during the

seventeenth century there were small Lalung principalities over an extensive area now included in the Nowgong district, specially, on its south and southeast. When Ram Singh, the ruler of Jaintia, captured Tamradhwaj the Ahom king Rudra Singh informed the chieftains of Gova, Nelli and Khola about the hostile act of their liegelord (Bhuyan 1951 : 141).

After the decline of the Ahom power, the Lalungs again came under the Jaintias. Between 1789 and 1832 there was very little disturbance in the Jaintia State except the Burmese invasion of 1824. In 1832 Sobha Singh, the Lalung king of Gova seized four British subjects from the plains and immolated three of them at the shrine of Goddess Kali. This custom was followed by the royal house of Jaintia, and it was possible that the Raja of Gova practised it with the royal sanction behind him. But the bulk of the population of his State who were Syntengs, Mikirs and Lalungs were never much influenced by this.

The British Government decided to put a stop to it. In 1835, Captain Lister marched to the Jaintia State. Its king surrendered and in the same year the dependency of Gova was annexed to the British empire. But the actual subjugation was not very easy. The hill people revolted. They were pacified on liberal terms. No revenue was demanded of them and their affairs were left to them. Petty cases were allowed to be decided by their chiefs, who were known as Dolois among the Lalungs and the Mikirs.

It is certain that the Lalungs have been living in the southern part of Jaintia Hills for a very long time, at least since the 14th century. The tradition of their migrations is not untenable historically. It is possible that during the attacks by the Ahoms, Koches, Kacharis and Burmese on the Jaintia State, there were civil commotions resulting in displacements and migrations of the Lalungs in the hills and the plains.

Notwithstanding these upheavals ethnologically they have been able to maintain their tribal identity, but not to establish independent States like the Dimasa Kacharis and the Jaintias (Syntengs). Dimorua was probably the oldest of all the Lalung principalities but it did not grow into a powerful State. The Dimasa king of Cachar claimed suzerainty over it, perhaps on the basis of ethnological similarities. Being a small community they were not able to carve out a state for themselves. They

were hemmed on all sides by other powerful tribal communities, namely, the Ahoms, Koches, Dimasas and Jaintias.

Historically the Lalung have affinities both with the Dimasa and the Syntengs (Jaintias). In this context an ethnographic exposition of their culture will throw light on the relationships between the Khasi (Syntengs) and the Bodo (Dimasa) societies.

CHAPTER THREE

VILLAGE AND ITS ORGANISATION

Since the task of the ethnographer is to provide representative descriptions of cultural groups, it enjoins upon him to choose his own starting point. When the group under study is large, the usual practice has been to begin with a village. But a tribe like the Lalungs who are scattered over a wide area, an ideal village representing all the facets of their culture could only exist in the mind of the ethnographer. The picture of a hypothetically typical village could emerge only after a study of their socio-cultural life has been made. Here, therefore, no attempt has been made to typify any village. On the relative distribution of the Lalungs between the plains and the hills field data were mainly collected from Nowgong, and in doing so, stress was laid on one particular village called Nambor.

The selection of the village has, however, not been at random. Certain factors were taken into account before the fieldwork was taken up. The first principle was to choose a village in which the Lalungs had not changed their mother tongue. Assamese being the dominant language, the plains tribes have acquired a natural proficiency in it. There are villages where the native language is not spoken. The use of mother tongue in any tribal village in this perspective has been taken as an index to show that it has retained its basic cultural contents. In this respect Nambor fulfils the condition. Not only the villagers speak Lalung among themselves, but even in dealing with any outsider they may not use his language as the medium of communication. They know Assamese, their boys and girls learn it in schools. Only the old women are not familiar with it.

The next criterion was that the village should be ethnically homogenous ; for, in many villages of Nowgong the Lalungs are living with non-tribal communities.

The last has been a historical perspective. The Lalungs have lived under the old Jaintia and Ahom States for a very long time in the past. The village of Nambor is geographically situated in an area where they came under the influences of both the States.

As a result of impact of ideas and values brought in by improvements of communication and developmental activities, no Lalung village in the plains conforms to a single pattern. No attempt has, therefore, been made to study the dynamics of transformation in Lalung culture. But as it is difficult to describe and analyse a society on a static level, changes and influences that are impinging on them have been noticed as they came up in the course of study. To enlarge the ethnographic scene, data were also collected from other Lalung villages, namely, Baropujia and Amswoi.

Nambor is about twenty six kilometers south by an all weather macadamised road from the district town of Nowgong. Regular traffic connects it to urban areas both in the north and the south.

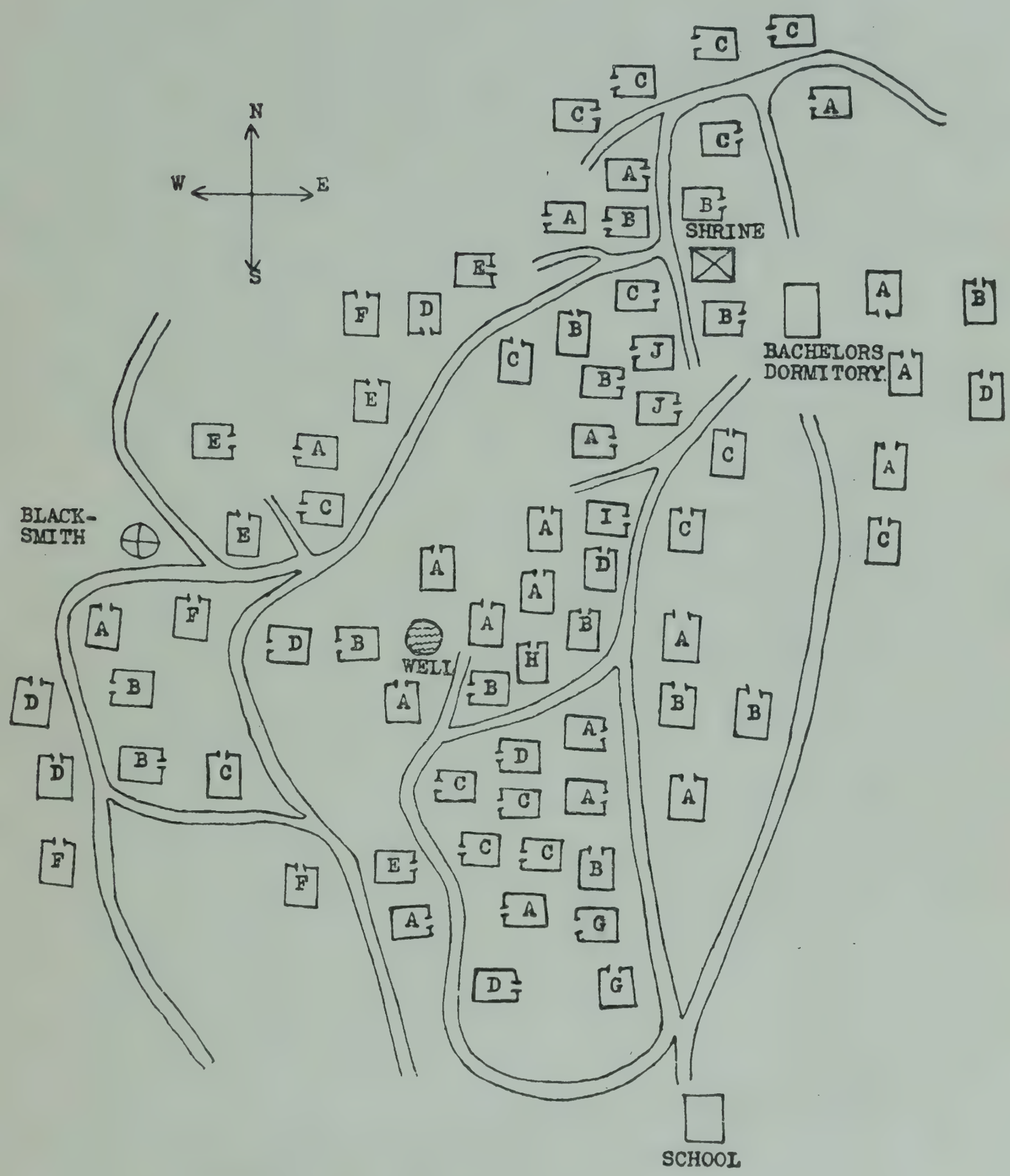
Around Nambor there are villages inhabited by other communities. The picture was different about eighty years ago, when communication had not developed. Then they, according to their own tradition, lived at a place about six kilometers further south, with Mikirs as their neighbours. It is said that they migrated to Nambor to escape the effects of a curse. One day a Mikir came to the Lalungs to sell dry fish. They bought it but some boys took away the price money from him. At this, he became angry and cursed them. Soon a disease broke out in the village, killing many. The survivors got scared and thinking that it was caused by the evil magic of the Mikir decided to move to a new place. The lead was taken by Nahor Singh Bordoloi, chief of the Amchong clan. He moved first with his own clan and settled at Nambor. Other clans followed and joined them.

This reminds one of the extensive movements of population which took place in Assam in the nineties of the 19th century as a result of the dreaded epidemic of Kal-Azar. But before that in 1794, when Ahom power was on the decline, many tribes in the low hills, south of Nowgong and Kamrup districts, came down and settled on the plains. The people of Nambor may represent a wave of one of these migrations.

As far as they remember, their village was linked by road to the district headquarters about fifty years ago. Since then other people have come and settled around Nambor. A market has developed at a place called Kothiatoli about three kilometers north, where roads from east and west meet. The place has now grown into an important trade centre. There are two rice

Sketch map of Nambor village showing clan-wise distribution of domicile

A sketch map of the Amswoi village showing clan-wise distribution of domicile



A : Maslai, B : Kholar, C : Lumpui, D : Melang, E : Hukal, F : Phangchong, G : Bumba, H : Kumba, I : Pumba, J : Chagara

mills within a distance of three kilometers between Nambor and Kothiatoli.

After the last World War, the means of communication have greatly improved. Vehicular traffic carries passengers to distant places. New settlers have come. A few Nepali milk-vendors have settled about three kilometers east of Nambor. Unemployed labourers from the tea gardens, who had originally come to Assam from Central India founded a settlement on the southeast. A group from the Bilaspur district of Madhya Pradesh, who had come to Assam in quest of land and employment, acquired land from the people of Nambor and built their houses nearby. These communities are not agriculturists like the Lalungs and there is little economic relation between them.

The residential holdings of Nambor are on the west of the road that connects it with the township of Nowgong in the north. On the other three sides, the settlement is skirted by extensive paddy fields.

Two small streams flowing east to west, mark the southern boundary of the village. Beyond the paddy fields in the west, about two kilometers from the settlement area, there is a long lake, which is fed by these streams. The general declivity of the village slants to the paddy fields.

From the macadamised road in the east, one walks about one kilometer to reach the residential area of Nambor. It has a population of 618, belonging to thirteen clans. The clans are shown below in the descending order of population.

Name of clan	Male	Female	Total
Amchong	107	102	209
Ladur	51	45	96
Madur	30	30	60
Kholar	28	30	58
Hukai	20	21	41
Sonjol	22	14	36
Songran	20	13	33
Khorai	15	16	31
Mithi	8	13	21
Khargol	8	6	14
Buma (Puma or Pumba)	3	5	8
Amphi	3	3	6
Maslai	3	2	5
Total	318	300	618

Of these Amchong is the largest. Its members built their dwellings first in the northwestern sector of the village and as they increased, they extended east and south. The houses are generally built in close proximity. At least three Amchong families live in some sort of a territorial clustering. To this clan also belong a few families whose traditional occupation used to be iron-smithy. They, however, have given up the profession from the last generation.

Every clan has a common house, called *borghar* for the performance of its own ceremonies exclusively. But community worships are performed on open sites especially kept apart from the dwelling houses in the village.

Contiguity of the houses of the same clan is also noticed in the hill village of Amswoi. Its nine clans are listed here according to the size.

Name of clan	Male	Female	Total
Kholar	29	30	59
Maslai	43	50	93
Melang	17	16	33
Lumphui	31	32	63
Kumba	2	2	4
Pumba	1	2	3
Bumba	4	11	15
Hukai	13	14	27
Phangchong	12	10	22
Chagara	4	3	7
Total	156	170	326

The big clans have their houses more or less in close proximity. But clustering of living houses is absent among the smaller clans, namely, Kumba, Buma (Bumba), Hukai, Phangchong and Chagara. The integrity of a clan depends largely on territorial proximity of its dwelling houses, which in its turn determines the pattern of the settlement layout. When families separate they build new domiciles on either sides of the village paths, facing other houses in the opposite row. As a result, the village paths run straight as far as permitted by the contour of the land. This is characteristic of Lalung villages in the plains also.

There is also a blacksmith in Amswoi. About twenty years ago, the villagers used to get all their implements from him.

But now they get them from the plains markets. The village blacksmith now only repairs old implements like big knives, spades, etc.

Unity of the village is manifested in its corporate life. There is an integrated system for maintaining a proper mode of conduct and co-operation between individuals, families and clans. The spirit of community life is inculcated among the boys through an organisation, which is symbolised by the *chamadi,* the dormitory where they live till marriage. Literally, chamadi means the place of enjoyment for boys (*cha*-boys, *madi*-enjoyment). But here they also learn to work in strict discipline. The dormitory is constructed on a site near the dwelling area from where all the houses are within easy reach. The main purpose of having the chamadi at the edge of the settlement area is that it may serve as a guard house for the entire village.

In Amswoi, the dormitory boys are divided into two groups, the senior and the junior. The junior group is called *khorkia-panthai* and the senior *khra-panthai.* A boy stays in the dormitory about twelve years. He joins the junior group at ten years, and remains in it for six years. During this time, he works under strict supervision of the senior boys. He brings water for them and tends the fire-place at night. He arranges their beds and do odd work that may be required of him in the dormitory. If he is at fault, the senior boys threaten to burn him, bringing cinders from the fire-place. But he is not beaten in the dormitory. In his behaviour towards the senior group, he has to observe a rigid code of decorum. He should not laugh aloud nor indulge in lewd talk in their presence.

The dormitory functions under the leadership of the *changdoloi,* selected from the senior group. The junior boys perform all sorts of work as directed by him. They hoe and level fields of the villagers, sow and reap their paddy, fetch bamboo from the jungle for building houses. When a villager wants a work get done by the dormitory boys, he goes to the changdoloi, offers him a pot of rice beer and asks for his help. If the changdoloi accepts the present, it means that he is going to help. Every work undertaken is usually completed within a day. The boys set out from the dormitory early in the morning and work till it gets dark. At noon, they have a short break for rest and lunch, which the villager who has engaged

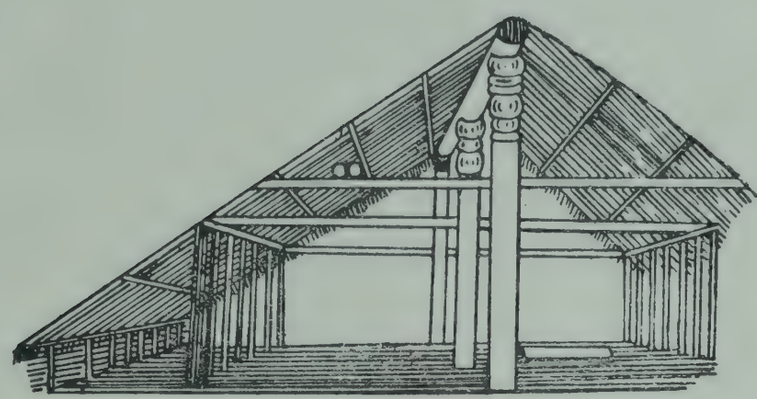


Fig. 1. An inside view of the Chamadi (bachelors' dormitory) of Amswoi

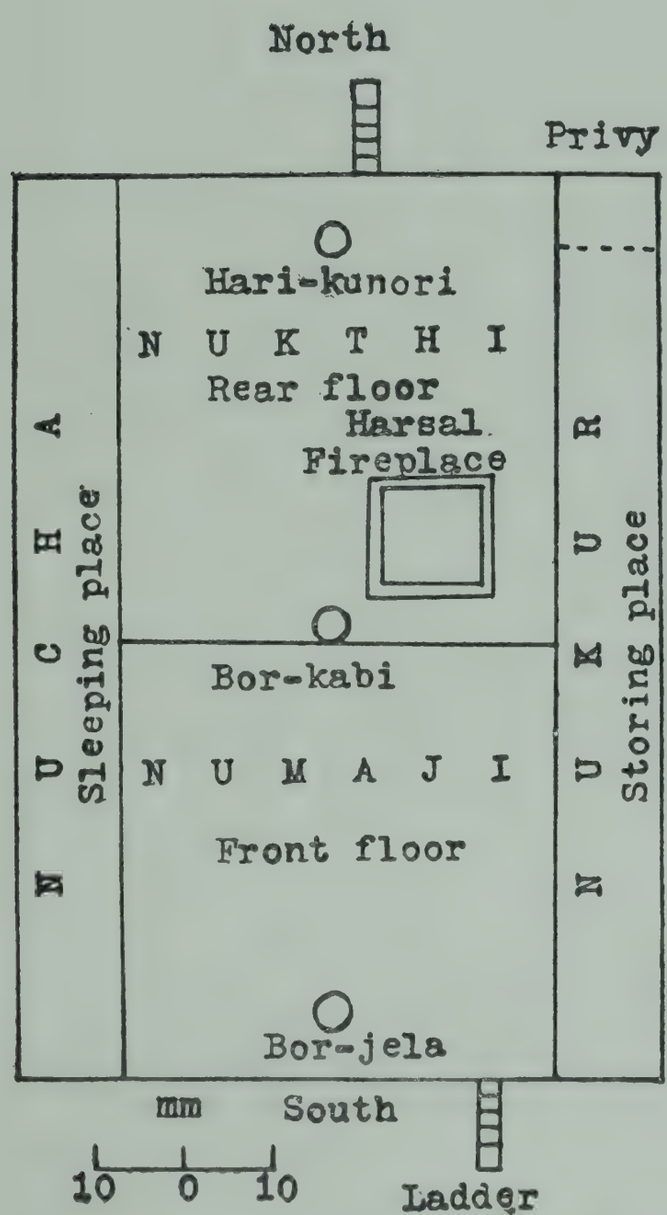


Fig. 2. Ground plan of the dormitory of Amswoi

them supplies. The juniors do the actual work, the seniors supervise and allay the boredom with music on flute and drum.

The usual fee for a day's work is ten rupees in their own village. It is higher if the work is in another. This they may undertake only when they are free of any engagement in their own village. The money so earned goes to the fund of the dormitory in the keeping of the changdoloi, and is utilized in the rituals and ceremonies of the dormitory.

Every junior has to work. If one tries to shirk or fails to do one's part of the work he is chastized by the changdoloi. This is, however, never reported in the village, lest the boy is further punished by his parents.

The boys must not sleep outside the dormitory. One may stay home when one is ill, but must return to the dormitory as soon as one recovers. In case, a boy stays out though not ill, the changdoloi and his deputy, the *changmajhi,* go to his house and bring him back. If he persists in not coming with them, the matter is taken to the *doloi,* the village chief, who calls a meeting of the elders. He discusses with them and gives the verdict. Usually, the parents are fined in cash in such cases, which has to be paid even if their boy goes back to the dormitory after that. But if they still persist in not returning the boy, the whole family is ostracised and forced to leave the village.

The dormitory boys may marry only when they are in the senior group. If any senior boy continues long unmarried, he merely sleeps as usual in the dormitory but lives a retired life keeping himself aloof from the other boys. Nor does he receive any respect and service from the new entrants to the junior group.

After six years of juniorate, the boys become eligible for the membership of the senior group. This transfer or promotion is an important event in the dormitory organisation as it is also the time of retirement of the old and the selection of the new officials as well as the demolition of the old dormitory house and the construction of a new one. It takes hardly a week to build the new dormitory. During this period, the boys live in a temporary house nearby built for that purpose. The work is supervised by the village chief and the leader of the dormitory. The boys have in it an occasion to learn how and with what materials a house is built. Special designs and figures are carved on the three medial main posts and the

crossbeams. The top ends of the central posts are moulded into various globular and bulging shapes and in the centre of the crossbeams shapely female busts are prominently displayed, so that they catch the eye as soon as one enters the dormitory. Besides these, geometrical patterns are incised on the rounded surfaces of the three posts. There are some old men in the village, who make these conventional designs.

The dormitory is the largest gable house in the village. It is open at both the ends. The floor is built on stilts about six feet high from the ground. On the sides, the roof is supported on small saplings over which it slopes down to the level of the floor.

The entire dormitory is divided into four undemarcated parts, each with a specific purpose. The area in front of the main anterior post is known as *numaj* and is used in ceremonies. The portion behind it is called *nukthi*. It is used for sitting. On its left is, as one enters, a square fire-place made of earth piled up from the ground below. Planks of wood are placed around it so that the inmates can sit on them to enjoy the fire in cold nights.

The sleeping place, *nucha,* is on the left as one enters by the front, between its wall and a row of posts, parallel to the central posts. On the opposite side to the left, there is a similar place where the boys store firewood and their implements.

The preparation for the construction of the dormitory is the duty of the boys who are to pass over to the senior group. On an appointed day after the summer sowing, the changdoloi and the boys go to the jungle to collect timber. The *loro,* the village priest, accompanies them. The changdoloi selects three big trees for the main posts of the dormitory. Before the first one is cut the loro prays to the deity of the jungle. "Oh lord of the jungle", he says, "We are going to cut this tree for making the front post of our dormitory, and it will be its big brother, the *borjela.* Be kind to us and don't take any offence with us". After that the tree is felled on the east. If it falls on any other side, it is rejected as inauspicious and a new one is cut. The two other of the three main posts are also felled in the same way. These posts support the central ridge pole, On which rests the entire super-structure and the roof of the dormitory. The ritual importance of these posts lies in their symbolic significance. The front post is the borjela the big

or elder brother of the dormitory. The one next to it in the centre is the *borkabi,* the brother-in-law to the borjela. The rear post stands for *hari-kuwari,* that is, the younger sister of the borjela. This symbolism is bound up with the ritual, for in his prayer to the lord of jungle before the trees are cut, the loro actually refers to them as such.

All other materials such as sapling, bamboo, cane and thatching grass are collected on the same day and brought to the village.

The construction, however, is not taken up immediately. They wait till the next sowing has been done by all the householders. The interval is used by the village chief, the priest and the boys to make preparation for *kheljawa,* the festival that celebrates the change in the dormitory organisation.

Loro, the village priest and *barikha,* the village messenger, call a meeting of all the married men at the house of the chief of the village, to select a special official called munsiff for the kheljawa. All the money that the dormitory boys have earned over the last six years is deposited with him. It is his duty to guide the dormitory boys in the proper utilization of the fund. He goes with them to the market and other villages to purchase pigs, fowls, ducks and salt. He has to see that the boys are not cheated or otherwise squander away the money. Huge quantities of salt (in Amswoi it is about 2000 kilograms) are purchased for distribution to the families of the new entrants to the dormitory.

After all kinds of grains have been sown by all the villagers, the dormitory boys fix the programme of the kheljawa in consultation with the doloi and loro. On the appointed day, which is usually a Sunday, the senior boys (*khra-panthais*) go to a place at one side of the village to get seedlings of jack-fruit, mango, tamarind and such trees. An old man of the village, on this occasion acts the part of the god Mahadev. He stands on a bamboo platform, with the seedlings in one corner. He announces his appearance by playing on a flute. The senior boys who have assembled in the dormitory in the meantime, go there with their leader, the village priest (loro) and his assistant (*hadari*). On the way, the boys dance and sing, and play drums and flutes.

The village priest approaches the platform where the old man is standing and offers him a pot of rice-beer. Then he

sprinkles ritual water all about from another pot, which had been ceremonially purified earlier by putting rice, cow-dung and a copper coin in it. On the ground in front of the platform, he draws nine concentric circles, in sets of three circles, the first one in yellow, the second in white and the third in black. This order is repeated in the other two sets. At the centre, a small mound is made of powdered rice, topped with a brass ring, with an egg on it.

He also makes a rectangular altar with clay about thirty centimeters high from the ground, and divides it vertically into three equal parts, each for a deity, the division on the left for the god Mahadev, the one in the middle to a group of four deities called *Chari Bhai* (literally four brothers) and the last to the *Bagh Raja* (literally, tiger king).

The priest stands in front of the altar made for these deities and begins the ritual with prayers on behalf of the dormitory boys. He prays for all-round happiness and plenty of fruits and crops. This done, he consults the will of the gods by divination. He takes the egg from the mound of rice-powder, cuts it in two with a knife and drops the halves on the ground. If one of the shells turns inside up and the other inside down the omen is neither good nor bad. The priest repeats the divination with a bamboo section cut lengthwise into two pieces. He lets them all fall together on the ground near the ritual altar and reads the omen from their positions, in the same way as for the eggs.

After the divination, the priest offers oblation to the deities in the places allotted to them on the altar. Helped by his assistant, hadari, he chops off the heads of two goats, one white and the other black. The blood from their neck is poured on the left end of the altar, dedicated to the god Mahadev. The two severed heads are placed there. The head of the black goat is an offering to the consort of the god Mahadev, though she is not allotted a separate place in the altar. Then he beheads four fowls and lets the blood drop on the place marked for the god Mahadev. The fowls are not offered to the deity, but feathers of their heads smeared with blood are put on the altar. The same number of birds are sacrificed for the Chari Bhai and the Bagh Raja.

Then the priest offers the old man on the platform rice-beer, of which he drinks a little. The rest is distributed to the dormitory boys. The leader of the dormitory now approaches

the old man and receives from him the seedlings of plants, which he and the other dormitory boys plant in a grove, where the trees planted by their predecessors on similar occasions stand. The ritual ends with this and the gathering now goes to the dormitory. Only some stay back to cook the meat of the sacrificed animals and birds.

Before the old dormitory is broken up a pacificatory ritual is performed over the three principal posts by the priest and the leader of the boys. They go near the front post, the borjela and pray for bestowing peace, happiness and strength on the dormitory boys. They beg of it not to take any offence if any of the dormitory boys had misbehaved or acted wrongly during the past six years. They gratefully recapitulate how it has supported their shelter and protected them from the sun and the rain. Then they behead a fowl and let the blood drop on the post. Some feathers of the immolated bird, smeared with the blood, are put on it. The rites are repeated for the other two posts. The dormitory is thereafter pulled down within a few hours by the junior dormitory boys. The seniors then return to the place where they have planted the seedlings for a feast on the meat of the sacrificed animals and birds.

No woman may enter the dormitory. They must keep away from it. They may, however, watch the functions of the dormitory, but from a distance. The old men of the village go there in the day to rest and to do sundry work such as making of baskets and mats with bamboo.

Two village magicians (*ojhas*) are the first to enter the new dormitory house. One of them makes a fire outside the building and carries it to the front entrance. Then the other receives the fire from him and formally places it in the fire-place.

The day following is that of the *kheljawa*. This is usually a Monday. On this occasion, oblations and prayers are offered to the deities who preside over and protect the land, homes and villages of the Lalungs, from enemies and unforeseen calamities. The ritual takes place in the numaj of the dormitory. Five pigs and a number of ducks and fowls are sacrificed and their blood is offered to the deities, a fowl and the blood-stained feathers for each of the three main posts. The meat is cut into pieces and divided into five parts. The leader of the dormitory gets one of them, and the *khandar,* the man who carved con-

ventional forms and designs on the posts and crossbeams of the dormitory, and the village blacksmith, the other two. One goes to the *changmaji,* the deputy leader of the leader of the dormitory, to feed, at his house, all the women, grown-up girls and chidlren of the village. The last share is taken by the old men and the inmates of the dormitory. They cook the meat in the fire-place and make a feast of it, that lasts the whole day.

In the evening, the priest and all the elders assemble in the house of the village chief (doloi) to receive the new recruits to the junior group (*khorkia-panthais)* of the dormitory. The leader of the dormitory and his deputy go to the house of the every eligible boy and bring them all one by one. They have already informed the heads of the households, who are the mothers of the boys, about the recruitment. On this day, they visit again the houses and explain in a song the purpose of their visit. They say that not from that day but from the days of the ancient ancestors they have followed the code of life framed and handed down by them. These are to be observed and perpetuated. For this purpose, the mothers should send their sons, born of their blood and flesh, to the dormitory. They will go to help the leaders of the village, the doloi and loro, in keeping up and maintaining the moral, social and other laws of the community, and thereby adding to its greatness.

The mother of a boy goes with them to the house of the chief of the village where the elders have assembled. She presents her boy to the chief and signs a song in honour of the assembly. She sings, "Oh respected sirs, in compliance with your order that the code of conduct of our community and that of the bachelors' dormitory should continue, I have come to present you one of your helpers, whom you will give the necessary training and understanding in upholding our glory. I pray that you will always run the bachelors' dormitory in strict discipline and will keep high its cause, do justice to all, and extend help to the villagers, so that we may live and prosper in peace. Now, I go back to my duties at home". The procedure may take the whole night if the number of the boys is large.

On the next day, the priest (loro), chief (doloi) and the elders again assemble in the dormitory to select the new officials, from those boys who have been promoted to the senior group (khra-panthais). Their leader (changdoloi) is chosen first

by the priest and the village chief on suggestions made by the elders. He would belong to a clan different from that of his predecessor. The other officials are also selected in the same way.

The main duty of the dormitory leader is to maintain discipline among the boys. He keeps with him the money they earn. When the boys go for work he sacrifices a fowl given to him by the householder whose work has been taken up, and smears the blood and sticks some feathers on the drum, This is done to placate any evil spirit that might be prying around to do harm to the boys. The senior boys play on the drum and flutes while their juniors work under the supervision of the leader who sees that the job is done in one day.

The leader is assisted by a deputy who is called *chang-majhi*. He has in his charge the dresses and musical instruments used by the dormitory boys on festive occasions. The next post in order and importance is that of the *barikha,* the messenger of the village. He proclaims the commands of the village elders and circulates them in the village and brings any one summoned by them to their presence. Where necessary the dormitory boys assist him. The fourth official in order is *huruma.* He is responsible for maintaining and keeping clean the village paths and the water sources from which the drinking water is obtained. During festivals, he keeps watch on the entire village. He has an assistant in the *hurmphali.* There are two more persons who are given odd duties on the occasions of ceremonies and festivals. They are the *khurinol* and *kra-kurumi.* The khurinol has the charge of rice-beer, areca-nuts and betels which he distributes to the elders. He is assistated by the *khuriphali.* The kra-hurmi cooks and makes rice-beer.

Apart from helping the various households of the village, the dormitory boys work on lands which belong to them. In Amswoi, there are about twenty eight acres of paddy land owned by the dormitory. The boys grow paddy on it every alternate year and store the harvest in the houses of such dormitory officials as are married. It is used for making rice-beer on festive occasions.

The organisation of the village dormitory in Nambor differs from that of Amswoi in certain important aspects. Nobody lives in the building and it has lost its function as a sleeping house of the young men. The floor is not built on stilts nor is there any permanent fire-place. Otherwise, the plan

is the same as at Amswoi. The house serves as a council hall of the elders. As the boys live in their own houses, the village organisation also differs in important aspects. Here the whole village itself is divided into six groups called *khels,* the *bura-khel* comprises the elders, the *deka-khel,* the young men, as well as important old men, the *ojhakhel phatkhel,* a dual group made up of the musicians, the *barikha-khel,* the messengers, the *phandari-khel,* in charge of food, and the *phura-khel,* the censors. Of these the first two between them include the entire masculine population of the village upwards from the age of fourteen. They also simultaneously indicate the division, on the basis of age, of the corporate activities of the village community. The other four groups are comparatively small and consist of a few specialised functionaries.

All the young men from fourteen years of age upwards constitute the deka-khel. One continues a member of it even after one's marriage. New boys are taken in the group after a period that varies from six and eight years. The leader (changdoloi) is selected by the council of elders, called burakhel (literally, a group of oldmen). Unlike the procedure followed at Amswoi, the leader here selects his own deputy (chang-majhi) with the consent of the village elders. For other posts, selection is made in order of precedence by these two persons with the consent of the village elders.

The changmajhi has four assistants, namely, *hurumai, tangaria, tiluakheda* and *rebhari* under him for special duties on festive occasions. The hurumai distributes food to the guests and the members of the deka-khel. The tangaria serves rice-beer which has been prepared in the house of the changdoloi, but his usual duty is to look after the water sources of the village. The other two, the tiluakheda and the *rebhari* hold the charge of the musical instruments and the dresses used by the young men in ceremonies, respectively.

The musicians collectively form the *ojha-khel phat-khel.* Their number varies from six to eight. The *barikhas* or the messengers who announce the decisions of the village elders, carry their messages and bring individuals summoned by them. The *phandari-khel* consists of two or three men, who cook and keep food in their custody. The phura-khel is formed of four or five persons. They go round the village on inspection to ensure that nobody violates the restrictions imposed by the bura-khel (council of elders) during ceremonies and festivals.

When the new leader (changdoloi) and his men taken over, they entertain all the members of the deka-khel and the village elders in a feast. Every new member brings a backetful of rice and gives it to the *phandari*. The messengers collect money from them and purchase pigs and fowls as available in the village.

In the evening all the men of the bura-khel and deka-khel assemble in the dormitory to bid farewell to the outgoing officials. Around a big fire, the village elders take their seats and tell the outgoing leader (changdoloi) to show how he played his part. He does it in symbolic gestures going several times around the fire. He is followed by the other officials of his group. The assembly breaks up late in night after a meal served by the new members. This brings the kheljawa, the festival of periodic change of the organisation of deka-khel in Nambor, to an end.

A member of the deka-khel cannot sever his connection with it unless to be admitted to the council of elders (bura-khel). The former office-bearers now work as ordinary members under the new leader of the deka-khel. They construct houses, till land, reap harvest and irrigate fields for the householders in the village. The leader (changdoloi) organises the working parties selecting men according to his judgment. He puts in a few boys, if the job is small and the whole lot of them if it is big. A day ahead, he sends, through a *barikha,* information, with details about the nature, time and place of the work, to those who have been selected for it. On that day he goes there and takes over the charge of the work along with the house-holder, who has sought his help. There he checks up his men. If he finds that some one has failed to report, he sends a barikha to tell him that he has been fined for absence from duty. The usual mode of payment of the fine is to give two fowls to the leader (changdoloi). The fowls are collected the same day, and eaten by all the workers in the house of their leader after the work is done. But if the fine remains unpaid the leader makes a note of it and orders the defaulter to pay it up at the time of a festival, called *Chongkhong*. This is very srictly enjoined. No remission is granted from the penalty. If a defaulter dies before the Chongkhong festival the fine is realised from his family. Ailing members are exempted from duty, but they have to bring it to the notice of their leader (changdoloi) ahead.

In contrast to the practice at Amswoi, the deka-khel has about five acres of agricultural land on which they work and grow paddy every year. The harvest is stored in a separate granary by the leader near his house. A part of it is consumed on festive occasions. But the bulk is kept in reserve, so that householders who run out of stock may meet their requirements from it. It is a loan to be paid back in kind at the next harvest.

The bura-khel or the group of elders is the highest in authority in the village set-up. They constitute the village council and are eight in numbers. They are selected from the deka-khel. Once a member enters the council, he remains on it for life. The village chief and the village priest cannot, by virtue of their positions, become members of the council. They can be co-opted if the members feel their presence necessary.

The duties and responsibilities of the council is confined to the settlement of disputes between the members of the village and to look after general welfare. They also take cognizance of any wrong done in the village and pass verdict on it even if their is not any complainant. Complaints are made to the village chief (doloi) who brings it to the notice of the council on the same day through a messenger (barikha). It is taken up by the council in a session in the dormitory on the next day early in the morning before the villagers set out on their work. If one of the contending parties does not turn up, they send a messenger to bring them to their presence immediately. One messenger (barikha) or two attend the session of the council, as witnesses may be required to be fetched as the proceedings go on.

A case is formally opened by the village chief. He asks the complainant to come up before the elders to tell his story. Before he launches on the narration, the complainant pays his respect to the members symbolically. He does it by placing a small coin on a tender banana leaf which has been placed in the middle of the floor where the elders have taken their seats in a circle. After the complainant has told his story, they ask the defendant to place his version before the council. He also pays his respect to the village council in the same way and gives his story. The case is then discussed by the members, and if any witness is required to be called the messenger (barikha) fetches him immediately. Generally a case is settled the same day, but the council may hold more than one session

if the execution of their order is postponed at the request of the contending parties. The village elders themselves do not give out the decision arrived at. The village chief announces it in their presence. His responsibility does not end with this. He is to see that the decision is executed and the fines, if any imposed by the council on any of the parties, are realised. He sends a barikha to the person concerned to collect it. If the fines cannot be paid immediately, the chief may permit it to be realised on the occasion of the Chongkhong festival. The elders of the council do not make any enquiry whether their orders have been carried out or not. But on the day of Chongkhong they hold a session in the dormitory where the village chief presents an account of the fines he has realised from various persons. The money is spent for the Chongkhong festival.

The power exercised by the village council in controlling relationships between persons is very wide. Three concrete cases are described here to illustrate the judicial functions of the council without mentioning the names of the clans and the parties involved in them.

In the month of May in 1965, the village headman of Nambor came to know of a clandestine relation between a boy and a girl, of two different clans. He brought it to the notice of the elders assembled in a meeting. The father of the girl was summoned and the case was opened in his presence. He confessed to the council that the girl was pregnant, but it was not known to him how it had happened to her. This was a grave case of moral code which had to be inquired into for arriving at a decision. In addressing the village council, the headman did not preface his harangue with the usual panegyric of the council as he was himself one of its members.

As the father of the girl was ignorant of the person res-responsible for the condition of the girl, it was considered better to question her. She was brought from her house by a barikha (messenger). One of the members asked her to tell how she had conceived and by whom. She remained silent and did not reply. She was then told that if she refused to talk she would have to take oath on the leaves of the sacred basil (*tulsi*), the prevailing belief being that if she did not tell the truth, calamity would overtake her within seven days. At this the girl became scared and gave out the name of the boy. The council allowed her to return to her house and sent a messenger to bring the boy and his father.

The boy was charged with the pregnency of the girl, and told that if he did not admit it, he would have to prove his innocence by taking an oath. The boy admitted his guilt. The village council discussed the matter and arrived at the decision : (i) that both the families be excommunicated, (ii) that no one in the village should go to their houses and neither eat nor drink with them, (iii) that they should not join any ceremony in the other houses of the village, (iv) that if any one went to their houses and took anything with them, he should also be made an outcaste, (v) that the two families might be taken back in the community if they ceremonially purified their wards and gave a feast to the village and (vi) that the girl should immediately be sent to the house of the boy as his wife.

On hearing the judgment, the parents appealed to the council that they should be given some time to prepare themselves for the expiation ceremony and to make arrangement for the feast. It was granted but the other restrictions were not withdrawn. After four months, the parents informed the headman that they were ready with money and would like to conduct the expiation ceremony and give the feast, as directed by the village council. The headman convened a meeting of the village council and they fixed a day for the performance in consultation with the two families.

The headman asked the leader of the deka-khel to help the families in making the preparations. The men of the deka-khel brought materials from the jungles and constructed a big pandal in which the villagers were to be entertained. The village priest conducted the expiation ceremony at a place lying in the southwestern corner of the village. He built an altar with earth and divided it into two equal parts, allotting the left one to the god Mahadev and the other to Chari-bhai, a group of four deities.[1] For the god Mahadev, a tiny seat in the shape of a platform was made with reeds but the other deities were symbolically represented with tender twigs of bamboo, one for each. The altar and a small area around it were ceremonially cleaned by sprinkling it with ritual water which had been sanctified with rice, cowdung and leaves of the sacred basil. He offered oblations of rice and two pots of rice-beer to the gods. The rice was heaped in the form pies, one in front of each division of the ritual altar, topped with brass rings and eggs. The fathers of the boy and the girl came in front of the altar and knelt down before it, each holding a fowl. The village priest ceremonially offered those birds to the

deities and prayed there to pardon their wards for the misdeed. The fowls were cut at the throat and the blood was let to drop on the rice pies. A few feathers, bits a meat of the fowls and a little quantity of boiled rice were placed before the altar.

The ritual ended with a prayer to the deities by the priest, on behalf of the parents and the members of the village council who were present there. They cooked the fowls at the place of ritual, ate the meat with boiled rice and returned to the place where the feast was arranged. The men of the village took their food in the pandal made by the boys of the dekakhel, and the women in the house of the parents of the girl. Participation by all the villager in the feast restored the excommunicated families to the social position.

The second case cited here relates to a theft. One morning in the month of March 1966, the headman of the village noticed that the ripe areca-nuts had been taken away from four trees in the backyard of his house. He suspected it to be the deed of some stupid boys and immediately requested the elders of the village council to hold a session at the bachelors' hall for finding out the culprits and punishing them. On hearing from him the details of the incident, the council sent a messenger to summon the suspects. They admitted their guilt and gave out the names of three other boys who had been with them. Those boys were also summoned and they pleaded guilty. The council fined them five rupees each and directed their parents who were present there to pay. Three of them paid immediately but the others prayed for time and were allowed to pay later.

The third example is about an unfounded allegation by a man concerning the character of a woman. It happened in the month of July, 1966. A man reported to the headman that he had seen a bachelor enter the house, where a married woman was alone after the husband had left to fetch firewood from the jungle in eastern side of the village. This was a serious allegation, involving the breach of the moral code. And the village council was convened to consider it.

At the session of the village council, the woman flatly denied the charge, taking oath on the leaves of the sacred basil. The decision was reserved for the council waited to watch the effect of the oath. A week passed by without any mishap to the woman. This established her innocence and falseness of the allegation. The village council absolved her

from the allegation. But the husband resented that his wife had been deceitfully implicated, lodged a complaint to the headman against the perfidious reporter and claimed that he should be punished. Otherwise, it would encourage false allegations being made in future in the village. The elders met in a session, discussed the matter and imposed a fine of fifty rupees on the person guilty of the fraudulent complaint.

Once elected the members of the village council hold their membership till they die or get too old to do any work. When a member dies, his place is not filled till the next kheljawa festival. The usual rule is that new members to the village council are elected after every six or seven years, if there exist vacancies to fill.

Before the kheljawa celebration is over, the headman in consultation with the village council announces a day for the selection of the members to it. The day before, those of the former officials of the deka-khel, who seek admission in the bura-khel go to the headman with areca-nuts and betels as "fees" or presents to him to register, in the customary way, their candidature. If the headman accepts the presents, they know that their names have been approved and would be placed by him in the meeting of the council.

Early in the morning on the appointed day, the members of the village council and the headman assemble in the bachelors' hall. A few old men of the village who, though not members of the council, are yet recognised for wisdom and sound judgment, are invited to join them. The candidates also gather there to learn the outcome of the meeting.

The deliberations of the council are open even to the candidates. The selections are usually unanimous. The headman formally announces the names of the persons selected and returns the areca-nuts and betels to those who have not been selected. The older members of the village council call upon the new members to entertain them with rice-beer and that request is complied with readily.

The council of elders is the highest secular body in the village. The headman may not be its member, but he acts in strict collaboration with it bringing all disputes to its notice, announcing its decisions and keeping for it the money realised as fines. The selection of the village headman is not made by the village council. In the village of Nambor, it is confined

to the Amchong clan which is considered to be the oldest and largest one in the village. This precedence is accepted by the other clans. The Amchong gained a position by virtue of its size from the earliest days of the village. A Lalung clan achieves dominance by the strength of its number and the size of the land it owns.

Notwithstanding his high position in the village, the headman cannot supercede the council of elders in secular matters. The headman does not get any special privilege in the council of elders by the mere right of his traditional status. On the contrary, he is co-opted only if the council finds in him a man of wisdom, capable of arriving at cool and mature judgment.

The headman is the representative of his village to the outsiders. In the old State of Jaintia, the headman used to represent his village to the king. He was the head of one of the tiny village republics of which the State of Jaintia was formed. The king was only a symbol, who consulted his village chiefs on policy decisions and on important issues (Lahiri 1954 : 148-49).

The position has changed in the course of historical developments. On the downfall of the Jaintia State, the Lalung headman lost royal support, but retained his position as the representative of his village to the outsiders.

The headman of Nambor has at present a recognised position with the Government. Important revenue communications are sent to him to be transmitted to the villagers. He acts as a liaison between the government and his village.

In the organisation of the council of elders and the group of youngmen, the village Nambor has a strong machinery for solidarity. But in spite of this, it has not been able to withstand the impact of the dominant culture of Assam. A part of its original population broke away from the village organisation about six years ago. They live in its north and observe their religious festivals apart. They consider themselves as *saranias,* the devotees who subscribe to the faith of Vaishnavism propounded by the Assamese saint Shri Sankardev. In marriage, they do not follow their original clan restrictions.

Nor do the people of Nambor oppose the changes and the consequent advantages coming to them through improved

communications, education and extension of village level institutions provided by the government.

Nambor is numerically larger than the other villages in the vicinity. About fifteen years ago, one of its well-to-do householders took initiative in building a school at Kathiatoli, a place about three kilometers to the north. He gave the money with which the school building was constructed. Pupils from the villages around attend this school. Two persons of Nambor hold important positions in its Managing Committee. Another man is the secretary of a village level government institution. He was voted to it by the people of the other villages as well as of his own.

These are clear signs that the people of Nambor take a lively interest in local leadership. The basic strength of the corporate life of Nambor as well as that of Amswoi lies in their youngmen, organised through the dormitory.

In the village of Nambor, the traditional form of dormitory organisation as found in Amswoi does not exist now. The main difference is that the boys of Nambor do not sleep in their dormitory hall. Notwithstanding this, in other aspects the organisation is functioning actively. Though the young boys are not formally taken into the dormitory house, they form into a well-organised group under their leader. None of the members of its working group are permitted any relaxation from the obligation to perform allotted jobs.

There is a keen desire among them to be entrusted with the various duties of the youngmens' organisation, so that they may get recognised places in it. An ambitious youngman would not spare efforts in any way in finding a chance to become its leader, and ultimately to become a member of the council of the elders.

The difference in position and power between the council of village elders and the group of youngmen is very great. The council of elders is the supreme authority in the village administration. Its members are not required to do any manual work, under the changdoloi, the leader of the youngmens' organisation. Their duty is to settle disputes and to give counsel to the headman and youngmen of the village. The changdoloi has under his command all the other married and unmarried men of the village, but he cannot act arbitrarily. When a house-

holder has to be done a work he goes to the headman of the village for direction.

The jural authority primarily rests with the council of elders. But the executive functions are divided. They are distributed among the village council, the headman and the youngmens' organisation, in a more or less integrated way, so that they cannot act independent of one another. The headman, though selected from a particular clan, cannot function, if he does not get any cooperation from the elders of the village on the one hand, and the leader of the youngmens' organisation on the other.

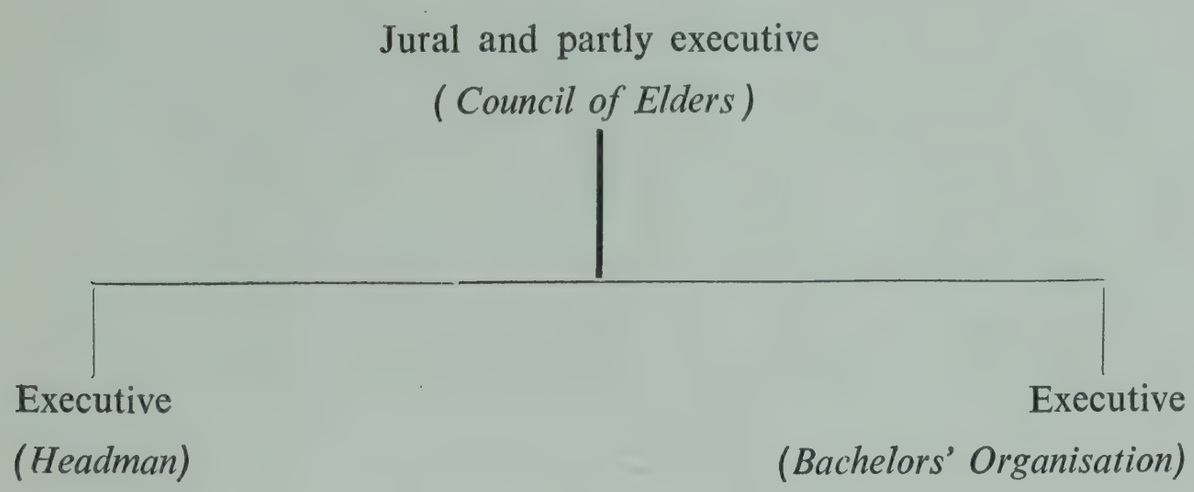
The members of the council of the village elders are not directly concerned with how their decisions are to be carried out. It is the duty of the headman. He may enlist the help of the leader of the youngmens' organisation in this. The headman and the leader of the youngmens' organisation report to them on any matter that comes to their notice concerning the breach of discipline and conduct in the village.

The power of the headman or the chief in a Lalung village is greatly circumscribed. A clan may monopolize the right of selecting the village chief or the headman, but he cannot act against the common will. The village council sees that he does not. A village chief may or may not be taken in the council of elders as a member. Where he is taken in it, it means enhancement of his prestige.

The power structure of a Lalung village is an echo of the system or pattern obtaining in the Jaintia State, when the king depended, for the internal administration, on the headmen of important and big villages, who formed an informal council. These chiefs in their turn were dependent on the council of the village elders. The power of the State came from the level of the people.

The relative position, distribution and inter-relation of power between the village council, the headman and the organisation of the youngmen of the Lalungs may be represented by the diagram given at next page.

The set up of village organisation of Baropujia is entirely different from those of Nambor and Amswoi. Baropujia is a multi-ethnic village consisting of the seven communities. The Lalungs are numerically predominant among them. The others are the Nath, Chutia, Koch, Kaibarta and some Brahmin families



who are divided into two groups, namely, the Ganaks and the Bamuns according to their occupations. The Bamuns, who have superior social status than the Ganaks, acted as priests in the rural houses of the Lalungs in the old days. They were brought to Baropujia about 175 years ago when the Lalung king, Sobha Singh ruled at Gova.

For managing their own affairs, the various communities have their separate councils of village elders. There may be more than one such council in a community, if its population is divided in separate territorial groups. Usually, each community has its distinct living area within the village. Such a division is called *khel*. Every khel has a *namghor* or prayer hall. Though it is primarily a place of religious service, the elders can meet there to discuss any matter or to settle disputes between the members of the khel.

The Lalungs of Baropujia are divided into two khels on territorial basis. One of these khels, which is larger in population, numbering about one thousand seven hundred, occupies the centre of the village which may be called the Baropujia proper. The smaller group lives in a small hamlet called Khaplangkuchi.

They have no dormitory organisation. But in each khel there is a large hall, open on all sides, where the elders hold their meetings. It is also used on festive occasions for dancing and community feasting.

In case of disputes between different communities, important members from the various khels meet by arrangement at a certain place in the village to adjudicate them. The lead on such occasion is taken by the elders of the predominant group. In Baropujia, the elders of the Lalung khels enjoy this importance.

Such a council is usually informal in character, as it meets only occasionally for specific purposes, such as, decisions on disputes between different khels, and developmental activities like building of school, roads and other welfare works, on behalf of all the people of the village who are collectively known as *raije*.

To illustrate how disputes between two communities are settled by the leaders of different khels a case is narrated here. It was about the marriage between a Lalung youngman who was a graduate and a Brahmin girl of the village. They married as a result of their acquiantance in the local school. The boy should have taken the initiative, after ascertaining that the girl was willing to marry him. But as there was no socially accepted way for a man to seek through marriage the hands of a girl from a caste which has superior social status in the village, the girl took the initiative in this instance and one day left her home and went to live in the house of her lover, where according to the Lalung custom, marriage was performed within three days. The father of the girl instituted a legal suit of abduction of her daughter. But it was dismissed by the trying court as the girl was found to be major in age and in absence of evidence showing forceable abduction. But the leaders of the various khels took a different view. Notwithstanding the decision given by the court, they discussed the issue in a *mel* or meeting. The purpose was to reach an amicable and socially acceptable settlement. The marriage was not nullified as it was not found repulsive to the existing law and that the girl was accepted by the parents of the boy. They decided that as the Brahmins were regarded as higher caste in Baropujia, the sentiments of the parents of the girl which were hurt as a result of the marriage, were to be assuaged by giving compensation in money. This compensation was to be given by the family of the groom and it might serve as a deterrent to similar incidents taking place in the village, which might well happen as the school was co-educational. Three meetings were held by the leaders of the various khels between September and November in 1960, before they arrived at this decision.

The groom and his father at the request of the leaders of the various khels, agreed to pay Rs. 2,000. On behalf of the various khels, some of the important leaders conveyed the wishes of the raij to the father of the girl but he refused to accepted the money.

The leadership of royal house of the numerically predominant clan has not changed as yet. All the elders of the khel of the other communities implicitly recognise the traditional position of the descendants of the Lalung royal house in the village. The present leader of the Lalung khel of Baropujia proper feels pride in the use of the surname of *dekaraja* as a mark of distinction and prestige. But it appears that this leadership of the Lalung khel is dependent on the numerical size. As a single khel, it has a population, which is three times bigger than the next one, which has a population of about 600, belonging to the Nath community, who were the traditional weavers at Baropujia.

But there is a rivalry in leadership between the two Lalungs khels. It is not the result of any inequality of power and prestige that exists between them. There are many educated persons among the Lalungs of Baropujia who are taking up the leadership from the older generation in the affairs of the village. But their activities have remained confined to the khels as the village leaders would not accord them recognition for want of experience.

In the corporate life of the village, the khel is the primary unit and nobody can go against the wishes of its leaders. The number of members of the council of elders in a khel depends on the size of its population. Usually, one elder person from a group of families who are closely related, form the council in a khel. They maintain social discipline and settle disputes in the khel. Before a dispute is taken into consideration, the contending parties are required to make some payment to the khel council when it sits in a meeting showing their willingness to abide by the decision that will be made. Usually, a party does not pay more than Rs. 10 on such an occasion. The amount to be paid is fixed by the khel council in each case according to the nature of the issue involved. After the case has been settled the deposit money, which is called *mel-mora,* is either fully allocated for meeting the expenses of the village prayer hall or namghor or given to the winning party as compensation.

In Nambor, the village is not divided into khels on territorial basis, but its council of elders and the youngmen of the villege are organised into two different khels or groups having different functions. The difference in organisation and concept of khel between Baropujia and Nambor shows that it is a term which cannot be defined either as a purely social or a purely territorial group.

The eastern tribes generally have dormitories in some form. The Lalung dormitory bears a general similarity to these. But there are a number of differences also. A comparative study will be helpful in tracing the nature of the organisation and in understanding its position in the social set up of the people.

Gurdon identifies the organisation of the bachelors' dormitory as a Tibeto-Burman trait (1907 : 194). His observation seems to be based on his finding that while almost all the tribes of Assam have a well organised system of bachelors' dormitory, the Khasis who speak a *Monkhmer* language do not have it. But this question cannot be fully considered linguistically. Gurdon himself mentioned that the Wars who are a section of the Khasi tribe have houses for bachelors in some of their villages. In the village of Nambor, the youngmen do not sleep in their bachelors' hall any longer. But it has not made any difference in the form of village organisations between them and their compatriots in the hills.

Endle, writing about the Kacharis, observes that the bachelors' dormitory probably obtained among them in the past but all the traces seem to have disappeared long since (1911 : 11).

Hutton also is of opinion that this system was prevalent in Assam among the Kacharis, but was discontinued apparently owing to the change in their cultural life (1926 : 73).

Though the dormitory organisation has died out there are informal organisations of youngmen in all tribal villages of Assam. The village defence parties organised under administrative guidance in the various parts of Assam are very active. They have a strong sense of ingroup consciousness and zeal for social service. Perhaps this kind of social outlook is a survival of the past system of dormitory organisation.

In the village of Amswoi, the dormitory is so large that it can be used as a living house for fifty boys at a time, leaving space enough to sit around the fire-place. The main posts which support the ridge pole of the huge gable roof are about twenty feet high from the ground. On both sides, the roof slopes down to the level of the floor where it is supported by small saplings. The eaves slope down about two feet further. The floor stands six feet above the ground, on a number of stilts. It is made of split bamboo except the fire-place, which is of earth piled up from the ground below.

The floor area is 1750 square feet. The dormitory is open at both ends. One has a clear view of what is inside the dormitory from outside. For reaching the floor one has to go up a notched log. Women and girls may not go into the dormitory, but may watch what goes on inside from a distance.

There are general similarities in the pattern of construction and size of the dormitory between the Lalungs and the other tribes of Assam. Usually, it is a huge gable type house built on stilts. But there are differences in the details. The Padam dormitory has a number of fire-places (*meroms*), each allotted to a hunting group (also called merom). They keep their weapons and prepare aconite for their arrow-heads near it. One of the longer sides of the dormitory is left open so that the inmates can maintain a watch over the village unobserved from there. The Naga dormitory is usually closed on all sides except in the front. It is so constructed that no outsider can enter it unnoticed nor can one hurt any of its inmates by thrusting spear from outside. The Lalung dormitory has no such constructional specialities.

An Ao boy entered his dormitory (*morung*) at about the age of twelve and could reach the top group of the village elders passing successively through eight phases of the dormitory life of three years each. In the Lalung dormitory, there is no elaborate age group system like that of the Aos, but its leader or changdoloi and his assistant changmajhi may play important roles in village even after their dormitory days are over.

The dormitory boys mount guard over the village in nights, but they do not keep any arms with them for this purpose. They visit their homes for meals, but may not stop there long and have to return to their dormitory as soon as possible.

There are close similarities between the Lalungs and the Garos in their dormitory organisation. The Garo term for dormitory is *nok-panthi,* which literally means the house for the youngmen (*nok*—house, *panthi*—youngmen). The Lalung name of *chamadi* differs in the derivative meaning from the Garo term, but both of them essentially carry the same implication denoting a place or house in the village where youths live and enjoy. The words for youngmen in both the communities are almost the same. In Lalung it is panthai[2] where as it is panthi in Garo.

The Garo dormitory boys are not divided into two working units of different age groups, but they spend most of their time with their age mates. As Burling writes, "It is here that boys learn the arts of drumming, playing the flute and jews' harp, and of blowing the horn ..... Day-to-day standards are now more often set by the group of bachelors, and if formal discipline is needed older lineage mates will enforce it" (1963 : 115).

The Mikirs share a common habitat with the Lalungs. In olden days, the youth of their villages used to live in a house called *maro* or *terang*. Now the boys sleep in a house in the domicile of the village headman (Stack & Lyall 1908 : 11). It is not comparable to the integrated form of dormitory organisation which the Lalungs have. But it functions as a well-organised club with a number of officials having similar duties as those of the bachelors' dormitory of the Lalungs.

They own cultivation fields, but generally work on others' lands in a round. If the boy workers fail in their duty they are punished by their leaders. They help in cultivation, practise dancing and singing and keep alive the tribal customs (Stack & Lyall 1908 : 12).

The Garos seem to have closer similarities with the Lalungs. The Garo youngmen enter their dormitory at an age between twelve and fourteen and are assigned plots in their family fields for their own use. They decide themselves when they should start operations and fix the periods without any interference from the elders (Burling 1963 : 115). The discipline, however, is perhaps not as strict as those enforced on the Lalung boys.

The productive enterprises of the dormitory boys are more well organised among the Lalungs than in the other tribes like the Nagas, and the Padams, Minyongs and Pasis of the Siang District of NEFA who also have the organisation of village youths. The Nocte and the Tangkhul Nagas organise their dormitory boys for agricultural work. The Thangkhul youngmen between twelve and eighteen years of age help others in house-building and cultivation in the fields, earning wages thereby which they spend for the maintenance of their dormitory (Sahay 1965 : 59). The Nocte dormitories or morungs have their own land.

It is a common function of the dormitories among the Nagas and the tribes of the Siang District to guard their villages

against sudden attacks. For the Naga boys, this was one of the most essential duties in the past. Besides this, the boys were trained in hunting. Among the Padams, there is a very developed system of organising hunting groups of the boys of the dormitory or *musup* (Guha 1963 : 83-84).

This aspect of the dormitory organisation has not developed much among the Lalungs. But it appears that in the past their their dormitory had a part to play in the defence of the villages from attacks. As among the Padams, the Lalung dormitory is located at a commanding site at one side of the village where all the paths leading to it meet before they lead to the interior of the village. At night they make merry and sing to the accompaniment of music. They have their own musical instruments such as drums and flutes which are in the charge of a senior boy. As a rule, they have two drums, one big and the other small. These are kept upon one of the crossbeams of the dormitory below the roof.

Among the Nagas, Padams and Mizos premarital sexual relations between the dormitory boys and the unmarried girls of the village were more or less regarded as an accepted form of courtship. During the field work among the Padams of Damro in the Siang District of NEFA, the author found that a dormitory boy could call without any restriction on his fiance in the *rasheng,* that is the girls' dormitory. In this way, intimacy and understanding developed between couples. Later on, the boy could go to her house and spend some time there. But he could also change his premarital partner, if the bonds of affection did not grow strong enough to bind them in marriage.

Shakespear wrote that among the Mizos (formally known as Lushei), the bachelors' dormitory or *zawlbuk* was the particular property of the unmarried men of the village, who gathered there in the evening to sing songs and tell stories, and make jokes till it was the time to visit their sweethearts, after which they returned there for the rest of the night (1912 : 22).

The Lalung dormitory boys do not have any socially approved privilege for indulging in premarital sexual unions, but it is not a totally unknown practice with them. The girls are quite conscious that they would be looked down upon if they go about flirting openly with the boys. Similarly, the boys also are cautious and avoid chances of detection of their intimacies with the girls by the elders. But they find ample scope for visiting the girls in the houses of their friends. The girls of the same

age move in groups and it is most always possible for a boy to meet one of them alone within or outside the village. But sometimes, a number of girls meet in the house of their friends and pass the night there. On such occasions, the boys try to meet their fiancées.

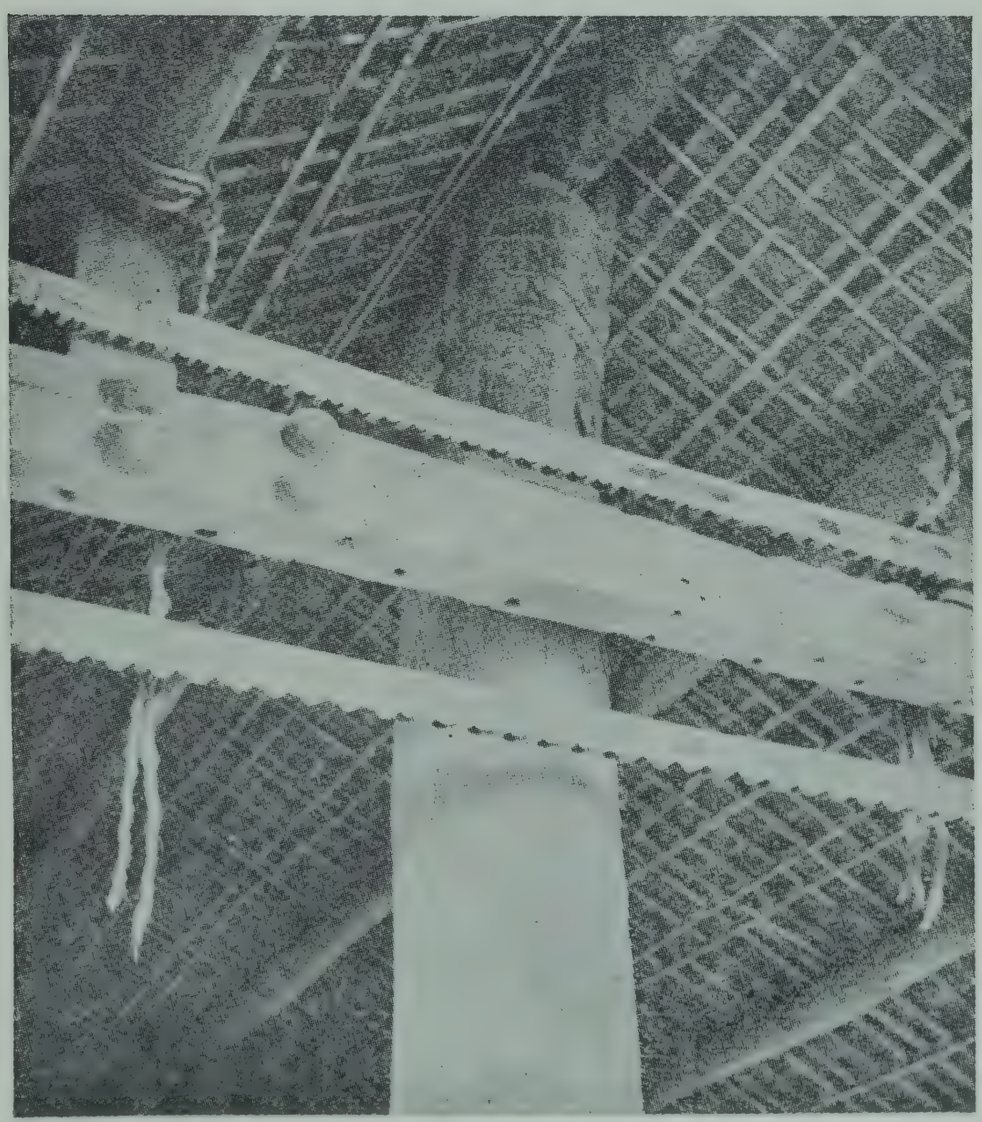
In the village of Amswoi, the elders do not like that the boys of the dormitory should have any premarital relations with the unmarried girls. But at the same time, they admitted that there was no restrictions requiring the boys to keep away from them. That is, there is neither a social sanction against nor in favour of such relations and in actual practice, it is suffered as long as it goes undetected. It is not the act in itself but any indiscretion in it that is a punishable wrong as theft in ancient Sparta. It is not unusual for dormitory boy to visit his girl friend at night in some appointed place.

In a brief paper on the Lalung living in the southern part of Jowai sub-division of the district of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the author writes that some members of the terang or dormitory may sleep out at night for visiting unmarried girls while they are spinning in groups in the verandah of some house. In the evening while the boys go to the *tirang* after meals, girls gather in groups to spin till late in the night at one another's houses in turn. They also sleep there. So usually girls do not sleep at their own houses. It is on these occasions that they get chances to meet the boys of the tirang and flirt with them. Sexual contacts, though not approved by the elders, are not rare. Illegitimacy is rare, for a pregnant girl is at once married. Sexual freedom before marriage within the tribe is connived at, if not encouraged. But if a girl tries to look beyond, outside the tribe, it is strongly resented (Sinha 1959 : 16).

In the plains village of Nambor as the youngmen do not sleep in the dormitory, they do not have similar scopes for amorous adventures at night, but they may meet the girls as they go out to work in the fields and they themselves are out with their friends in the village. The village elders however would not countenance if a boy indulges in any premaritual sexual act and is detected.

Prenuptial sexual licence is frowned upon but at the same time there are no restrictions to keep the boys and girls from it. A similar situation obtains among the Garos also. Writing of the village of Rengsanggri, Burling observes that sexual relationship between the unmarried dormitory boys and the girls

The bachelors' hall (chamadi) of Nambor



Symbolical carvings of female breasts on the cross-beam of bachelors' hall of Nambor

of the village may take place at any time of the day or night in the village, fields, jungles, wherever privacy is possible. But at the same time, he makes it clear that neither premarital intercourse nor adultry is socially approved. The ideal is certainly to confine sexual relationship within the limits of marriage, and the girl who has become pregnant is markedly less desirable as a wife than one who has not. Virginity in itself, however, is not prized and most of the men seem to have sexual experience before marriage (1963 : 73-74).

Though sexual intimacy before marriage is considered undesirable among the Lalungs, the young boys and girls manage to get it without much difficulty. Sex, therefore, does not appear to be an inhibition. Sex experience before marriage is not a totally unacceptable form of behaviour, provided the couples are married in case of any issue being born to them. The village elders would disapprove of it but they would not withhold their sanction to the marriage on that account.

There is nothing in the life of the domitory boys that can make them inhibited towards sex though they are supervised by their leaders. The carvings of female breasts on the beams of the dormitory cannot be taken as an expression of repressed sex. Against the accepted disapproval of unrestrained premarital sexual contacts these motifs definitely make a deep impression of the young dormitory boys. Could these not be meant as inducements for selection of mates through courtship, and take up the residence at the house of the wives ? A senior boy would not feel happy to stay in the dormitory after he has passed the second phase of his life in it. If he remains unmarried at the end of his dormitory days he would be in for in different treatment from the new boys. Nor would the other senior boys of the group like him to stay there. The prevalent social norm is that before a new batch forms into the senior group, the old boys should vacate the dormitory by marrying.

In the village of Amswoi, it is usual for a boy to marry before he has ended his full period in the senior group of the dormitory. By this time, he has acquired all knowledge and technical experiences for running the house by his own labour. Since he is not able to return to his house of birth, as that would be against the social custom, after he has attained his full manhood, the only way left to him is to marry and live with his wife.

The purpose of separating the young boys from their families is primarily motivated by a desire to get them acquainted with the organised system of life in the tribal norm. Along with this important lesson, the boys also learn manners and customs. At the same time, they also find opportunities for enjoying life. It is very usual for the boys to organise periodic dances in the dormitory. Here they learn to sing and play with indigenous instruments such as the flute, the drum and the harp made of strings. Sex is also not a closed door to them. As they grow up it becomes clear to them that sex has to be gratified ultimately by marriage through courtship.

There is nothing very clear to show why the Lalung dormitory system is originated. Avoidence of incest could be a cause of its origin. Sinha suggests that among the Garos the main aim of the dormitory is to safeguard against a probable incest. as in their cultural development the unconscious oedipus and incest feelings are comparatively strong (1966 : 97-98).

Shakespear appears to suggest a similar origin of the dormitory system in the Mizo Hills. In his book on *The Lushei Kuki Clans,* he writes,

> "In the absence of the *zawlbuk,* the youngmen generally sleep in the houses of well-to-do villagers, but among the Purum I am told that 'if a man has an unmarried son and an unmarried daughter, the boy goes to sleep at the house of a man who has an unmarried daughter ; though they sleep in this way they are very careful about their characters'. Have we here stumbled on the real origin of the 'young men's house'—a desire to prevent incest ? The young women also have houses in which they gather at the time of festivals, but they do not sleep there" (1912 : 52).

The prevention of incest or keeping down the unconscious oedipus by separating the boys in the dormitory and to inculcate in them the social behaviour were the possible aims which necessitated the formation of bachelors' organisation among the Garos. But it is not possible to say with conviction how far the prevention of incest or keeping down the unconscious oedipus by separating the boys is the main motivation behind the dormitory organisation among the Lalungs. Avoidance of incest is not a peculiar psychological phenomenon of the tribal society. It is a common social trait in all societies.

The main aims and objectives that lie behind the dormitory organisation among the Lalungs are: (1) that it is a place where all the boys get training for work, (2) that the boys by living in the dormitory acquire knowledge about the community life of the village and learn how to take part in the social life, thereby developing their personality and leadership, (3) that it is the place where they can enjoy leisure in a group.

The dormitory is an institution by itself. It can be taken as the integrating symbol in which lies the inherent strength and individuality of the village life. As a focal point of the village administration, it has similarities with morung system of the Ao Nagas described by Mills. He considered the Ao morung as a microcosm of the village.

Among all the tribes of north-eastern India who have the dormitory for the youth, the village elders use it as their meet-place for discussing important matters. On such occasions, the youngmen learn the tribal laws and custom as expounded by the leaders.

As for example, when a Padam boy enters the dormitory, he finds how the clan leaders and the elders speak in the session of the village council with authority and comes to know thereby the ethics of his community (Syamchaudhuri 1965 : 274). The Lalungs do not constitute their village council primarily on the basis of clan leadership, but among both of them the dormitory serves as the training place for the future leaders of the village.

In short, it is in the dormitory that a Lalung youngman receives all the training needed for him to become an independent householder, and to bear the responsibilities of his wife and mother-in-law. Among the Garos, the village elders use the dormitory as a place for meetings (Playfair 1909 : 39). In such assemblies the Garo youngman learns the codes and ethics of his tribe by observation of the acts and ideas of their elders. In moulding and patterning the life of a youngman through the dormitory the Lalungs and the Garos have the same objectives, but unlike the Naga and Padam boys, they do not receive any training in hunting and in the use of arms.

There is another point of similarity between them in the pattern of carvings on the posts and beams of the dormitory. The cross beams of the Lalung dormitory are decorated with carvings of developed female breasts (*chujhu*). In addition,

geometrical designs, forms of animals and birds are incised on the posts. Similar designs are found in the Garo dormitory. Human figures, both male and female, mostly very exposedly nude, and figures of animals such as tiger and hog and reptiles are carved on the posts and heams. Such decorations are characteristic of the *nokpanthe* (Sinha 1966 : 93).

These carvings perhaps emanate from sex repression. But it may also be argued that the frank and bold display of sex parts of the body in these carvings are intended to free the inmates from inhibition.

The Lalung dormitory system is not fully a microcosm of the village organisation, but it is merged in it as one of its integral part. The Khasi, with whom the Lalungs have certain similarities in social life, are not believed to have any dormitory organisation for their young boys. But one section of the Khasis, who are called Wars, have separate bachelors' quarters in some villages (Gurdon 1907 : 32). Similarly the Lynngams, who are akin to both the Khasis and the Garos, have houses in some of their villages where the young unmarried men sleep. Such houses are also used for accommodating guests and holding village festivals (Gurdon 1907 : 194).

In general, it may be stated that the practice of keeping the bachelors in a separate house is not a general feature of the Khasi society. If avoidance of incestuous oedipus situation had been the main cause behind the origin of the Lalung bechelors' organisation, such a system would have been, in all probability, found among the Khasis who have the same pattern of social structure. On the contrary, it appears that the formation of an organisation like the bechelors' dormitory is not compatible the Khasi concept of the constitution of family.

The Khasi male sibling has a recognised place in his family which is not severed even after he takes up his residence in the house of his wife. Between the male and the female siblings, the consanguine bonds are maintained throughout the life and after death too. It seems, therefore, that the parents do not consider it very important to seggregate their sons from their family for any special social purpose. It would be very interesting in itself to inquire into the nature of oedipus situation in the Khasi family, but without going into it further for the present it could be assumed that the absence of dormitory organisation among the Khasi, does not imply that they are free of suppressed incest desire. What is important is that since the Lalungs and the

Garos have the dormitory organisation, but the Khasis who have a common social pattern with them do not have any, it can be taken that the avoidance to incest could not have been the main purpose of the dormitory organisation among the former two.

It is not merely a symbol of the youthful vigor. A young man after he gets into it has a view of his society and the future constitution of the family of which he would be a member after marriages. The period he spends in the dormitory is, as it were, one of transformation of his personality from boyhood to manhood. Socially, his life can be divided into three parts. The first one is the period which he passes as a boy in the house of his birth ; the second one begins when he enters the dormitory and the third, which is the last, starts from the day when he goes to the house of his wife after marriage.

There is no scope for exercising any option in the matter of becoming a member of the domitory. A boy is automatically included in his village dormitory after he has attained the age of ten. The admission may be delayed a little on account of the kheljawa, but not beyond the age of fourteen when he is supposed to have normally attained his puberty. As belonging to an organised unit, the dormitory boy cannot go to join his family in the agricultural operations without the permission of the leader, but then usually he helps all the householders of the village in their major agricultural works in turn. He does not maintain any active connexion with his family. Of course he goes there daily for his meals but just for that and may not remain there after it. This is very strictly enforced.

While in the Lalung society the parents wholly entrust their boys to the leader of the dormitory for all kinds of training, the Garo parents retain much of their hold on their boys even after they have entered the dormitory. The boys sleep there but they are not under any system of close supervision by the senior boys or leaders. They get their training in agricultural duties from their parents with whom they normally work as members of the family. One of their important duties is to help in capturing a husband for any suitable bride who is usually a cross-cousin. Without their help, it is not possible to go to another dormitory to find out a bridegroom and bring him to the village. In doing so, they gather fair knowledge of what would come to them when they grow up. It is a process through which the boys are conditioned to a certain type of

cross-cousin marriage prevalent among the Garos. A Lalung boy has no such thing to do. But in another way, during his dormitory life he becomes fully aware that one day he will have to go to the house of his bride and become its supporter where however his brother-in-law exercises authority in certain phases. He makes himself familiar with this idea which is structurally symbolised in the construction of the dormitory, as noted before.

The organisation of khel on territorial basis is not unknown in the Naga country. About the Sema Nagas, Hutton writes that the basis of their society is the village or a part of a village (*asah*). "Such a part of a village is usually known in the Naga Hills as a khel. This Assamese word originally denoted an exogamous group of the Ahoms and was extended to the Nagas first of all, perhaps to signify an exogamous group, but later regularly for the part of a village inhabited in the Angami country by an exogamous group, and thence for a division of any village, which in the Sema country is very rarely coterminous with an exogamous group" (1921 : 121n).

Similar divisions are also found among the Ao Nagas. According to Mills, though these divisions are purely geographical, the members belong to a single language group or clan or are later immigrants to the village. The khel may have its own council, but it remains an integral part of the village, which is the real political unit of the tribe. For most purposes, however, the social unit is the khel (1926 : 82, 176).

In 1609, the Ahoms organised the khel system on an entirely different basis on which depended the entire economic and political strength of their State. The adult population in the State was divided into service groups or khels for such work as arrow-making, boat-building, house-building, provision-supplying, fighting, collection of revenue, road-making, catching and training of elephants, training of horses, supervision of forests, etc. Sometimes a khel was also constituted on territorial basis, that is, the people of a particular area were organised into a single khel. Probably, such a group was ethnically homogeneous. Each khel was allotted lands for cultivation by the members free of rent in return of services to the State. The strength of a khel varied from three thousand to one hundred men. A high-ranking State official was in charge of each khel and as such he was sometimes designated as a kheldar (Bhuyan 1949 : 10).

Since the Lalung principality of Baropujia was a feudatory chiefdom, in the past, under the Ahoms, the communities excepting the royal clan were divided into different territorial khels. Each of them perhaps had a particular task to perform for the chief or *raja*. As for example, the Nath (*Jugi*) and the Kaibarta appear to have been the traditional weavers and boat-builders of the State respectively. Similarly, the Chutia and the Lalung clans formed the soldiery.

With the advent of the British the *paiks,* as the members of the khel were known, were gradually freed from the liability to serve the State or their masters. But their territorial basis was not disturbed. Even now at the root of the village organisation all over Assam, specially among the bulk of its rural population composed of the Kacharis, the Kalitas, the Naths, the Kaibartas, the Chutias and the like, lies the khel organisation. The members of a khel are strongly united into a socio-political unit.

Bhuyan notes the marked similarities between Ahom khel and the Mogul *mansabdari* systems, and suggests that the Ahoms adopted it from the Moguls whom they had known from their frequent political contacts (1949 : 11). But it appears that the system was an indigenous one, older than its organised introduction by the Ahoms in their State formation. Probably, the ancient tribal population in Assam were divided into smaller territorial groups on the basis of clan. Among the Nagas, there are clans which are organised into separate khels on territorial basis. They have their own words for such a division. The Lalung, the Khasi and the Garo clans also have similar territorial affiliation. The term khel perhaps originally meant a social group which was formed on the basis of territory.

NOTES

1 According to the Lalungs of Nambor, *Chari-bhai* or *Chari-bahi* *Chari-kora* is the name of one single deity. *See* fuller discussion in Chapter VII.

2 cf. Khasi *Kynthei.*

CHAPTER FOUR

NATURE OF CLAN

The Lalung society is divided into a number of clans. In the past, they often fought between themselves over the right of selecting chiefs and for gaining dominance in village organisations. Such internecine feuds caused movements and grouping of clans into clusters.

According to a tradition in Baropujia, the clan Puma brought the Phangchongs under it after a fight ; the Amchong won domination over the Amchi in the same way. But forcible induction of clans into integrated clusters did not result in any hierarchical inequality between them. On the other hand, the dominant clans treated the adherents as profitable additions (*dhon-tola*) to their folds.

Grouping of clans through fights was not confined only to the Lalungs. Gait writing about the origin of Khasis and Syntengs observes that "from time to time some ambitious chief would conquer and absorb some of the adjoining communities, and the kingdom thus formed would continue to exist until the weakness of his successors gave an opportunity for the prevailing disintegrating tendency to assert itself, when it would again dissolve into a number of small independent communities" (1963 : 312).

But it is not possible to draw any general conclusion that all Lalung clans owe their origin to this process. It is not known how they got their different names. According to one account, it appears that certain clans derived their names from the places where they had lived originally.

In course of their migrations from the Jaintia Hills the Lalungs lived many years at Amswoi where they used to hold an annual ceremony called *Jongrang,* and a stone slab was set up as mark for the performance. The large number of stone slabs planted on the ground at a place near the village of Amswoi in the United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills, perhaps, recall this old tradition of the Lalungs.

At this place, they split into five groups on account of internal rivalries and then dispersed. Later on, these groups

came to be known by the names of those places where they had first settled after dispersal. As for example, those who settled at Amchong were known as Ams-ali. In this way, the the others were called Majrong-ali, Rongkhoi-ali, Amni-ali and Majra-ali. The word *ali* in Lalung means the female sex, more precisely the female line of descent. Suffixed, it indicates that the groups were matrilineal.

The two villages of Amswoi and Rongkhoi, in the western part of the Mikir Hills, were perhaps the old abodes of these clans. At present they are very widely distributed. The Ams-ali clan was found at the very distant village, Balijan, in the Lakhimpur district during a survey in 1959.

The number of Lalung clans are not uniform in any of the present day villages. Commonly, three or four of them are clustered together. In each village, there are two or three of such clusters, but there are also clans not so grouped. Notwithstanding this, the total number of groupings or clusters and the unclustered clans taken together do not generally exceed twelve in number.

There is a tradition that explains the limit in number. The Lalungs believe that all their clans have descended from twelve sisters, who were born in a family which lived on a red hill. They grew up but did not get young men to marry. As time went by they became dejected and lost interest in life. One day as they were spinning, they thought that it was no good to live longer as they were passing their youth, and they went to a river to drown themselves. But the god of water took pity on them. He sent twelve young men who met the sisters as they came to the river and they married. The Lalung clans are the progeny of these twelve sisters.

The common clusters among the Lalungs include not less than thirty-one individual clans (*khuls*). One particular clan in each cluster is regarded as the principal or the dominant one according to its traditional position in the past. These clusters or *maharis,* as they are known, and one isolated clan are listed here, the name of the dominant clan occurring first in each group.

(1) Mosrong, Machereng, Magor
(2) Madur, Ladur, Puru, Chagara
(3) Moloi, Phangchong, Pumba (Puma)
(4) Dafar, Mithi, Lamphui

(5) Hukai, Khorai
(6) Amchi, Agara, Chanchar
(7) Kush, Mithi
(8) Chalong, Muni, Melang
(9) Kakhor, Darpong
(10) Amchong, Amchi
(11) Darpong, Damlong, Kholar
(12) Lorom

It appears, however, that there are clans which were inducted into these folds from other communities ; for some clans have different stories of origin.

The clan Amchi, which as subjugated by the Amchong, believes that they have descended from a monkey who was endowed with divine powers. The feeling of this kinship is so real that they refrain from killing the animal.

The Hukai clan has a tradition that when they were living in Khairam[1], one of their women Padmavati by name, conceived supernaturally from the moon (*Sondra*). She was driven out, but was given selter by the Lalungs of Amswoi. After some days, a tiger was born to her and it was allowed to go to the jungle. Then she gave birth to a boy who was taken by the Lalungs of Khaplangkuch, a hamlet of Amswoi. This boy was said to be the first anscestor of the Hukai clan. The Hukai do not kill tiger, as it would be an act of parricide. If they learn of the death of any tiger, they bring it to their village. It is mournfully carried, as if, it were a dead man to the cremation ground on a stretcher made of bamboo, covered with white cloth woven at home by the women. Those who help in the cremation take bath before they enter their houses. On the same day, the people of the Hukai clan refrain from doing hard and important work : they do no agricultural work nor cut fire-wood. The women do not weave. Besides, none touch the granary on that day. The feeling in this relationship is abiding. During field-work at Nambor in the winter of 1965, a tiger appeared near it for preying upon the grazing cattle. A party from the village went to kill it. But no one belonging to the Hukai and the Mithi clans take part in this hunt.

The Mithi have a similar belief in descent from a tiger, but their story is different. A man of the Kush clan fell in love with his cousin of the same clan and married her. But as it was a great offence against the low of their society, the couple were driven out from the village. They went to live in a jungle. One

day as they were roaming in the wood the wife who was carrying was overtaken by labour pain. She asked her husband to to fetch drinking water. The man set off but arrived at a place where only women lived. They got hold of him and did not allow him to go back. In the meantime, his wife who was lying alone in the jungle gave birth to a male child. She waited for her husband for some time, but as he did not come, she left the child behind and went to look for him. At that time, a tigress happened to come there in search of food for its cubs. Seeing the infant alone, the animal throught that its mother had also gone out to bring food for her child, and went near it. The child cried aloud at the sight of the tigress but she thought it was hungry and put her teats into its mouth. The boy stopped crying and sucked. From that day, the tigress nurtured the boy, till he was able to walk. Then one day he came out of the jungle and settled in the Lalung country. He married in due course and his descendents formed a separate clan which came to be known as Mithi. The Lalung word for tigress is *misa*. It is likely that the name Mithi was derived from it.

The legends of origin of the Hukai, Mithi and Amchi clans indicate totemism. In Baropujia, the people of Amchi clan claim to have descended from a monkey, but the tradition is that they got their name from a village in the hills where they lived earlier.

The Hukai and the Mithi do not trace the actual descent from tiger. The relationship of the Hukais with the animal is that it was a tiger which was born first of their ancestral mother Padmavati, whereas with the Mithi it was that their ancestor was nurtured by a tigress.

A similar idea of kinship with the tiger exists among the Kacharis also. The *mosa-aroi,* one of their subtribes, claim kindred with the tiger, and all the inhabitants of a village peopled by them go into mourning on hearing the death of a tiger in the neighbourhood (Endle 1911 : 25).

It is very likely that these beliefs in the origin may have some relation to lycanthropy. The Garos who are a branch of the Bodo tribe like the Lalungs, appear to have lycanchropic beliefs.

The number and grouping of maharis are not same in every Lalung village. A cluster may have new clans or there may be unclustered clans in different villages, but what is basically uniform is that the groups do not exceed twelve in number.

In Baropujia, only twelve groupings are found and some of them, namely, Hukai, Madur and Phangchong do not belong to any cluster. In Nambor and Amswoi, three more unclustered clans, Sonjal, Songran and Maslai are found.

The names of the clans in themselves, except in certain cases where they have reference to past territorial affiliations, bear no indication about their origin. But it might be probable that they were named after plants, trees, animals and various other inanimate objects. The Kacharis and the Garos have clans which are named after animate and inanimate natural objects. Of the twenty, Kachari "subtribes" mentioned by Endle, fourteen were named after living beings and inanimate objects. The Garos have also a similar clan nomenclature.

The grouping of clans into clusters is essentially a local feature of the Lalung society. It could have been effected in two ways. The usual process has been the splitting of a clan as it grew in size, and the other was forcible induction and integration of new groups into a numerically dominant and powerful clan. Once a clan attained the right of selecting chiefs from within its own group, it could not have possibly retained its supremacy without bringing under its control other clans to secure their support.

Such a relationship is found among the Kush and Mithi clans which are clustered together. The former being the dominant one, have the privilege of selecting chiefs from their own kinsmen. The people of the Kush clan were formally ethnologically different but were integrated into the Lalung society through historical contacts. In the Lalung tongue, Koch is pronounced as Kush.

In the 16th century, the Koch king Nara-Narayan brought the king of Dimarua, which was a Lalung state, under his protection from the oppression of the Kacharis and settled him on the border of the Jaintia State with jurisdiction over a tract inhabited by eighteen thousand people (Gait 1963 : 111). It is quite likely that a contingent of the Koch army stationed there were gradually identified as a Lalung clan, though they retained their separate identity.

Similarly, the tradition that the people of Puma clan won over the Phangchongs appears to have some historicity. In Baropujia, the Phangchongs claim that they are the descendants of one Arimatta, who was an important historical figure accord-

ing to the chronicles of Assam. His son Jongal Balahu was attacked by the Jaintias and was finally killed by their Lalung adherents at Kajolimukh, a place on the bank of the Brahmaputra (Nath 1948 : 54).

The number of clans in a cluster ranges from two to four usually. These groupings do not overlap but certain clans may have common affiliations to two or more clusters. As for example, the Amchi have relationship with two clusters. In one of them, it has the status of a senior clan while in the other it is grouped with the Amchong as the main clan. Similarly, the Mithi is included in two clusters but in none of them it has the position of the main clan. But such double or multiple clan affiliations between clusters are not found in the same village. The variation in position of a clan in different clusters probably reflects its past vicissitudes. A dominant clan could not have retained its position always owing to internecine rivalries, keeping all the subordinate clans in its fold permanently.

In Nambor, there are thirteen clans, namely, Amchong, Maslai, Ladur, Madur, Hukai, Khorai, Sonjol, Amphi, Puma (Buma), Kholar, Songran, Mithi and Khargol, but all of them are not grouped into clusters. Only eight clans are grouped into four clusters, consisting two in three of them and three in the remaining one. The grouping is given here the clan which holds the senior position in each cluster, being mentioned first.

A	B	C	D
Amchong	Ladur	Hukai	Amphi
Amchi	Madur	Khorai	Sonjol
Amri-Amchong			

The elderly persons of Nambor said that not all the clusters and clans with whom they lived now, were with them before they migrated to their present place. The original groupings as they remember are :

(1) Mosrong	(1) Puma (Buma)
Machereng	Phangchong

The Mosrongs and Macherengs are found in Baropujia, the former are dominant as belong to the group of Lalung kings of that place. They did not settle at Nambor. Similarly, the Phangchongs did not follow the Pumas. Two other clans, namely, Amphi and Amchi which had settled at Nambor have not survived.

The Amchong hold the dominant position in Nambor, as by tradition they belong to a royal house. They arrived there

first and occupy the major portion of cultivable land in the village. They were followed by two other clusters headed by the Ladur and Hukai clans. In the settlement area of Nambor, these clans have their domiciles in contiguous lands.

There is no social heirarchy in the status of a clan of any cluster nor between the clusters themselves. But in certain clusters, clans are distinguished on occupational basis. When the people first settled there, they had no blacksmith to make implements for them. The Amchongs brought in a family of blacksmiths from another village and gave them land to settle on. The descendants of this family were distinguished occupationally as a separate clan.

Similarly, in Baropujia the palanquin-bearers to the Lalung kings form a separate clan. Perhaps originally they belonged to a different ethnic group common in the Hindu society, but were integrated into a Lalung clan by the petty chieftains who flourished in Nowgong in old days. This clan is distinguished by an Assamese word, *laram,* which literally means 'soft'. It implies that this clan is somewhat of soft or of lower status than the other clans. In Baropujia, the people of laram clan were not allowed audience with the king except on the occasion of *Bohagimela.* It is said that there were also certain other clans who were similarly treated by the royal house. But this occupational distinction in the present day is obsolete. Marriage between them and the other clans is permissible.

In Nambor, the people of Amri-Amchong clan, who had stayed in the plains on the northwest of the ancient Jaintia State, do not participate in the Mahadev Puja held during Kheljawa, the periodic festival of the young men, as they are not a full-blooded Lalung clan. But otherwise no distinction is made between it and the other clans in the village. Among the Syntengs, who live in the hilly terrain to the north of the Lalung country, one generally finds a blacksmith in every village. They were originally mostly plains people who came to these hill villages from the Surma Valley (now in Pakistan). Through a long association, they have been integrated in the Synteng society.

In each cluster, there can be only one main clan which is supposed to have descended from one of the twelve sisters, while the other clans in it are considered to have descended from a female sibling in the generation next to the original ancestress.

In the plains, every clan believes in its relationship with one of the twelve sisters ; but when they migrated from the hills they were divided into two groups. The names and order of seniority in age of these ancestresses are no longer remembered by any of the clans. There is no social dichotomy between them. Factual assessment of this tradition is not possible, but most Lalung clans have their affiliations fixed to either of these groups. Occasionally, one may find a clan not claiming affiliation to any of these two groups. In such a case, the indication would be that either it migrated to the plains at a later date or belonged to the autochthonous stock in the plains on the north-west of the ancient Jaintia State. Classifications of the clans in groupwise affiliation as told by the elders of Nambor are :

Amchong	12	bhanis (sisters)	Madur	7	bhanis (sisters)
Ladur	7	,,	Sanjol	5	,,
Mithi	5	,,	Kholar	5	,,
Khargol	7	,,	Songran	7	,,
Kharai	5	,,	Hukai	5	,,
Buma	7	,,	Amphi	7	,,
Maslai	5	,,	Phangchong	7	,,

It appears that clans which are clustered together claim affiliation to the same traditional group of sisters. In the groupings or clusters of the clans as known to the people of Nambor, only in one cluster the clans are affiliated to two different groups of sisters. They are the Sanjol and the Amphi.

That the division of Lalung clans into two groups was effected in the plains in course of their migration can be taken as a historical fact. Dating is not possible, but its sociological bearing in integration of clans into different clusters has continued in their local groupings. There is no hierarchy or restriction of marriage between these two divisions.

Collectively a clan cluster is called *mahari* but it is also the name in a restricted sense for a clan. The terminological implication of the appellation is significant. Mahari is formed of two separate elements.

In Lalung, as well as in Dimasa Cachari, *ma* can be taken as equivalent of the English mother.[1] The other part of the term, *hari* literally means a female descendant, who does not change residence after marriage. Preceded by ma, hari refers to those kins who consider themselves matrilineally consanguinous. Initially a mahari consists of those kin who can trace consanguinity through the female line. But in a more comprehensive

sense it also means a single clan or a cluster having more than one clan in it. The bonds that binds a cluster lies in the belief that all its clans have descended from different female colaterals of the same womb.

The matrilineal Garos have similar divisions of kins or maharis which are related through the female line. The Garo *machong* is constituted of a number of such maharis. Various scholars, namely, Playfair, Bose, Burling and Nakane who have worked on the Garo clan or machong generally agree on this. The Lalung clan is obviously a much bigger group than the Garo mahari, which appears to structurally better defined, being composed of immediate kins traceable through the mother. Theoretically, it could be taken as a geneological construct of a descent group of four generations. Biologically, continuity between the marimal and the maniual generations in such a group would be co-extensive as by the time the last colateral sibling of link generation would die the first sibling of the fourth generation below would be form.

As in Lalung, the word in Garo the mahari is formed of the separate terms, ma and hari, but with different meanings. The Garo word for mother is ma, but it is only used in reference while hari literally means a line. Combining with ma, hari means the line of descent traced through the mother. Structurally Garo mahari is a smaller group within the machong, which is initially a territorial group. The term *chong* means a place, particularly village. As such, machong collectively refers to the maharis who live in the same village.

Certain Lalung clans have a tradition that they were named after the places where they lived originally. The Garo maharis have both territorial and consanguineous bonds between them, but such bonds are not commonly found among the Lalung maharis. The Lalung clan can be typologically considered as an extended ramification of a structural group like that of the Garo mahari. And in a more elaborate sense. The Garo machong being composed of related maharis, becomes comparable to the clan cluster of the Lalungs. Marriage is forbidden among the Garo maharis of the same machong, so it is between the Lalung clans of the same cluster.

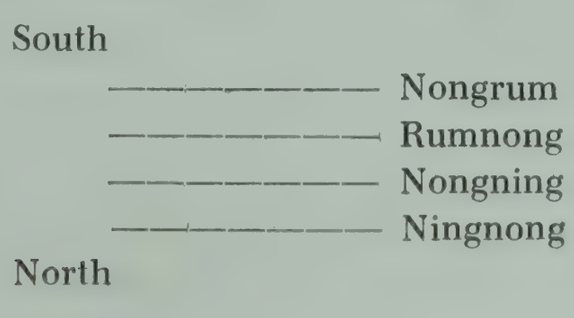
The clustering of clans on the basis of common consanguine bond traced in the female line is also found in the Khasi society. As among the Lalungs marriage is forbidden between the Khasi clans which are considered to be related.

Certain clans, namely, Kharsawian, Kharphanbuh, Kharbudnah and Khardympep are clustered together as they are said to have descended from four ancestral mothers who were themselves born of one womb. The prefix *khar* before the names of these clans indicate that they were originally not full blooded Khasis. The popular belief is that they were the descendants of women who were captured by the Khasis from other ethnic groups in the plains (Gurdon 1907 : 66). These four clans do not intermarry owing to their traditional consanguinity. They can marry with any other Khasi clan without any restriction. Although, they are distinguished by the term khar, there is no variation in their status in the Khasi society. As it happened among the Lalungs, it is evident that these clans were inducted by the Khasis into their society.

Proliferation of original clans into separate units has been a common social process among the Khasis. This has been also a feature of the Lalung society, the difference being that their twelve original clans, as they believe, may intermarry.

But the Khasi clans claiming a common origin from the same womb do not intermarry. When a particular clan increased in size some of its members separated and went away in search of new lands and were distinguished in course of time as a separate clan. There are many of the Khasi clans which were formed in this way.

To cite an example, the members of Nongrum clan have a tradition that they are not to marry into the Rumnong, Nongning and Ningnong clans as they were originally the same people. The original abode of the clan was in the Jaintia Hills. When the families increased their elders thought it necessary to draw up proper demarcation of the land between them. It was divided into four parts and the families grouped themselves accordingly. The members of the main clan, Nongrum, remained in the southern portion of their original habitat, while the others moved northward, each group occupying its own land. The order of this migration and the consequent division of clans can be diagrammatically stated in the following way :



It is quite evident that the Nongrum clan proliferated on territorial basis when it increased in size and its people extended westwards from the Jaintia Hills. Between these clans, there is a certain phonetic continuity in their names. Taking the last syllable *rum* from the parent clan Nongrum, Rumnong is formed by suffixing *nong* to it. Retaining this syllable, the next name is formed by adding *ning* to it, and the last one by reversing the position of the two syllables of the preceding name. This kind of phonetic relationship is nothing but an expression of the territorial and consanguine bonds that exists between them. Another set of such Khasi clans were formed by the Hujon and the Huroo clans, who considered themselves to have descended from two sisters born of the same womb.

It may be conjectured on similar phonetic relation of names that certain Lalung clans might have been formed in the same way. Mosrong, Masereng and Magor display similar phonetic relationship. It is also noticed in a few other clans, namely, Madur and Ladur, Hukai and Kharai, as well as Dharpong and Dharlong. This kind of expression of belongingness to a common stock or line of descent is very pronounced among the Padams of NEFA. In the line of descent or legendary tradition, proper names are formed by prefixing the second syllable of the preceding name to a new syllable in the successive stage. Through this process of nomenclature, lineal affinities of families, clans and the connected events and traditions are traced and preserved in the memory (Syamchoudhuri 1966 : 273).

But such phonetic link in names is not a common feature of all the Lalung or Khasi clan clusters. To cite a few, the following Khasi clan clusters which were formed in a process of fission from common stock, do not have any phonetic link in their names :

(a) Synrem, Jarain
(b) Hyn-niewta, Basaiawmoit
(c) Diengdoh, Laloo
(d) Jyrwa, Nongsiej

Intermarriage between the clans of each group is forbidden as originally they were one clan. It is not known where the people of the Synrem clan originally lived in the Khasi Hills but when their size increased some families moved out and settled at a separate place and assumed the name of Jarain. Similarly, the Diengdoh separated from its parent clan Laloo in the Jaintia Hills. The Nongsiej also similarly broke off from

the Jyrwa as it increased in size. It is not known if there exists consanguine tie of common descent between the Hyn-niewta and Basaiawmoit, but they do not intermarry.

Formation of new clans through fission has been common to both the Lalung and the Khasi society. But the converse process, that is fusion of clans through internecine feuds has perhaps been more important a factor among the Lalungs owing to historical circumstance especial to the indigeneous administration among them.

In the past, the Lalung tribe came into conflict with a number of contending powers, namely, the Dimasa Kacharis, Jaintias, Koch and Ahoms. It is quite possible that during these conflicts the alliances of the various clans had to be shifted leading to a change in the traditional formation. The Khasi society was comparatively less affected from alien interventions in the past than the Lalungs. It is probably due to such historical differences that Khasi clans were not formed into clusters headed by dominant clans as those among the Lalungs.

Many Khasi clans had their original abode in the old Jaintia State, whence they migrated westward. It is quite likely that the Khasis and the Lalungs in the past had a closer affinity in the patterning of clan clusters. Playfair mentions of twelve territorial divisions among the Garos. Their social implications are not clear nor do they bear similarity to the twelve clan clusters of the Lalungs.

But what is striking is that both the Lalung and the Garo societies are constituted of maharis or clans in which descent is matrilineal, though in the organization pattern they differ in certain respects. The Lalung maharis can be constituted of a single clan or of a number of clans clustered together. A family in a clan cannot trace lineally their kins beyond two generations and so the consanguine relationship practically snaps beyond three generations upward.

Such a consanguine division of mahari is comparable to the smallest division of clan among the Khasis which is known as *shi iing* consisting of the grandmother her daughters and their children. The next bigger division of the Lalung mahari is composed of a number of three generations of consanguine groups who are able to trace descent from a common great grandmother of their clan. The eldest daughter of the house which represents the lineal extension of the clan in a village

is called borhari (*bor*—big, older ; *hari*—line). In literal translation, it means that she is the seniormost female descendant of the clan in a particular period, as lineally she is the oldest daughter in the surviving generations. Through her the primal line of descent in the clan is maintained. This group of kinsmen can be compared with the Khasi *shi kpoh* or sub-clan which consists of all the descendants of one great grandmother (Gurdon 1907 : 63).

In a Lalung village, there is always a borhari who represents in every generation the original line of descent in her clan. In other words, it can be said that the mahari in every village has its borhari. All the families whether those which can trace a consanguine relationship or which believe in a common descent through her from their original ancestress come under one mahari.

Structurally, the Lalung mahari and its sub-divisions are similar, down to the lowest level of the living generations, to those of the Khasi clan or *kur*. Among plains Lalung mahari is also known as *kul*. This name to be a borrowed term from the Hindu society in which it refers to a smaller group within the clan or *gotra,* but it could also be a phonetic variation of the Khasi clan appellation kur. It appears the Kachari also use this term for distinguishing a sub-tribe among them (Endle 1911 : 24).

The Lalung clans probably split in the process of accretion into new groups, each occupying a new region or alienating a portion from the territory of the parent clan. The territorial basis of Khasi clans is better defined than that of the Lalung clans. This variation has occured due to the different historical vicissitudes of the two tribes had in the past. Comparatively the Garo mahari is more rigidly defined, both structurally and territorially. Among them, the mahari in the smallest lineal division of the machong, which is primarily a territorial group. All the maharis commonly share the same machong land. In this sense, it includes all the kinsmen of a villages, who have descended from a common ancestress.

It should be possible to trace a Garo mahari genealogically, but no such record of descent has yet been attempted. But it appears to be a group of matrilineal kins of three generations. It would be a structurally viable group comparable to the smallest division of Lalung mahari and the *shi iing* of the Khasis.

Playfair wrote that in his time the size of a Garo village was fairly big. It consisted of as many as three hundred houses, but with the stabilization of administration families moved, in small groups, closer to the lands owned by them. It is in search of new lands and occupations that the Garos have moved away from their original villages in the Garo hills. But in spite of this the members of the maharis that constituted a machong did not change their affiliations to it. The persons belonging to the same machong are regarded as a close relations, though they may be living hundreds of miles away (Majumder 1956 :15).

Structurally, the Garo machong is comparable to the clan cluster of the Lalung. But as an exogamous group, it appears to be more rigid than a Lalung clan cluster which controls marriages more or less on a local basis within the village. The Garo rule of machong exogamy is fixed and it cuts across all territorial distances among its maharis.

Although it is rare, a Lalung mahari can have affiliation to two different clusters but not in the same village. Totemistic belief is prevalent in certain Lalung clans namely Hukai, Mithi and Amchi. A Khasi clan bears the name affinity with *shrih* or monkey. But its members do not have any totemistic relation with the animal in as much as they do not abstain from killing it (Gurdon 1907 :65—66).

The Garos also do not have any apparent totemistic belief although one of their clans traces its traditional origin from a bear. Most of the Khasi clans were named after their original mother or ancestress. It is quite likely that the Lalung maharis and Garo machongs were also similarly derived their names from those given to their original mother after natural phenomenon like the plant, animal and river and village.

The clan structures among the Lalungs, Khasis and Garos are very similar ; there are also significant differences in their concepts and organisation. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

1 A chiefdom in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

2 Hari or Sari, a row, line.

Ma (mother) + Sari > Mahari—Mothers' Line

In some of the Eastern Hindi dialects the forms Buari, Dhiari and Matari are met with specially in abuses. These terms refer to daughter-in-law, daughter and mother groups. Is the 'ri' in these terms remnant of ari < hari < sari meaning line or row ? In that case, it would indicate the system of *hari* prevalent in those areas in early times.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARRIAGE, CLAN AND FAMILY

The basic function of the Lalung clan or cluster of clans is regulation of marriage. No marriage can take place within a clan or between clans of a cluster. Structurally, the clan is a division of matrilineal kins. Sometimes, a clan may have the word *ali* suffixed to its name. In such a case, it is considered to have descended from one of the twelve original sisters. It is not usually grouped with any cluster. In the plains, clans are very rarely distinguished by suffixing ali to their names. It is only in the village of Balijan which is situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the district of Lakhimpur that the people were found using ali after the names of their clans. There were twelve clans, namely, Nahol-ali, Dafa-ali, Dorong-ali, Kholar-ali, Hukai-ali, Dumur-ali, Mikir-ali, Ams-ali, Sams-ali, Solong-ali, Kumra-ali and Ghogai-ali.

These clans have a tradition that originally they lived in certain places in the southwestern part of the Nowgong district. The people of Kholar-ali clan said that they belonged to the royal house of the principality of Khola, a place near the hills in the southwest of Nowgong. Some other names of clans such as Dumur, Dumra, Ghoga can also be identified with names of places and villages in the southwestern part of Nowgong where the Lalungs are mainly concentrated.

It appears that in the past the Lalung clans were divided territorially. In the hills, the Lalungs can be broadly divided into five divisions or sub-tribes, namely, Mukro, Rongkhoi, Amsi, Marjong and Amswoi. In each division, there are a number of clans which are usually not concentrated in any particular village. These divisions have come to be known by the name of the principal or the dominant village in their territory.

In the plains, such groupings of clans into bigger territorial divisions are not found but they are clustered into groups. It is probably because they were originally organised on territorial basis, but as a result conflicts for power between the Ahoms, Kacharis and the Koches from which the Lalungs could not keep themselves aloof, the system got disorganised.

Two kinds of clan clustering are found among the Lalungs. One of them is based on the belief of a common descent from an original mother. The other divisions are organised on territorial groupings under the leadership of chiefs or dolois of big villages. In the territorial divisions, there are clans which are grouped into smaller clusters of consanguine clans.

The two types of clustering are not mutually exclusive. It appears that originally the territorial divisions were formed from a core of a consanguine group of clans living in a particular territory. As it grew in size it branched off, the dominant clans from which the chiefs were selected, bringing under control other clans and forming bigger territorial groups.

Marriage is not effected between the members of clans who are grouped in the same cluster. But they can marry if they belong to separate clusters and different villages. A clan sometimes may be included into two different clusters, but marriage between them would not take place if they belong to the same village, as its consanguine bonds of descent would not be severed by common adherence to two clusters. This rule, however, may be relaxed in respect of a clan which is found in different villages but adhering to separate clusters.

The Mithi clan is affiliated to two different clusters, but its members do not marry among themselves, for they constitute one clan in spite of their dual clustering. Multiple affiliations of clans in more than one cluster are very rare in the Lalung society.

In actual practice, exogamy is regulated on the basis of clusters which are confined to particular areas or villages. In other words, within the larger compass of clan exogamy clusters regulate marriage at the level of the village they belong to.

In every village, the clans are divided into two of more exogamous clusters. As traditional residence is uxorilocal, a man after marriage does not usually leave the village of his birth. There is not preferential form of marriage in the Lalung society. A man is free to choose his wife from another village also but such an occasion does not arise mainly for two reasons.

A young man does not find ample opportunity to meet girls of other villages. His life is regulated in an organised way in the dormitory. He normally comes into contact with the girls of his own village only and it is usual for him to marry one of them.

The other reason is that a man even after his marriage has to discharge some social duties towards the family of his birth. If any dispute on division of land or other property arises among his sisters, he is called upon to arbitrate. A sister cannot dispose off any land of the family without consulting or taking permission from her mother or mother's brother or in their absence her own brother.

In Amswoi, marriage normally takes place between its young men and girls of different clans and clusters. Though a young man enters the dormitory when he is about twelve and lives there, he gets a thorough knowledge about all the land-holdings of all the families of the village including his own, as he works as a member of the dormitory for every household in the village. The economic set up of the village is based on the interdependence between the household and the dormitory boys. When a man marries, he does not want to leave the economic environment with which he is familiar. But marriage between the boys and girls of different villages can take place through negotiation. In such a case, the villages would be as near to each other as possible, not usually farther than a day's walk.

Marriage of a Lalung with an outsider is uncommon. But if a non-Lalung marries a Lalung woman, the residence is always uxorilocal. There are a few cases where Mikir men have married Lalung girls.

A Lalung woman would not leave her house after marriage for that would deprive her of all her rights to property. She would not be the head of her home, if she were to take her residence at a husband's who was not a Lalung. In Nambor only one Lalung girl married a Mikir man, and left her village to live with her husband.

A Lalung man usually does not marry outside his society. Socio-economic consideration is against such an union ; first, if the order of inheritance in the society in which he marries differs from that of his own, neither will he get any land to settle and cultivate for maintaining his family in that society, nor will he be allowed to bring his wife to his own village and start a new house. Secondly, induction of any non-Lalung woman through marriage would be a wrong thing to do. For it would be a breach of the rule of exogamy. But it is in order if a non-Lalung man marries a Lalung woman and takes up residence with her. In the Lalung conception of matrilineal

Preceded by the old lady, the woman is going into the house of her husband for the first time after marriage

The old women are telling stories to the young girls in afternoon

The earthen pots for keeping rice beer

inheritance and uxorilocal residence, such a marriage is not socially incompatible. The Lalungs and the Mikirs live in the same habitat. There have been a few marriages between these two tribes and almost in all the cases it was the Mikir men who took up their residences with their wives.

The rule of exogamy of clan cluster is strictly followed in the Lalung society. If any couple breaks this rule they are ex-communicated and forced to leave the village. They are not allowed in it on any occasion.

Among certain clans from which kings or chiefs were selected in the old days, the heir-apparent in the line or royal succession did not leave the house of his birth after marriage. In Baropujia, the members of Mosrong clan to which its royal house belonged, do not even today change their residence after marriage.

This deviation from the uxorilocal pattern is due to the rule of royal succession which descends in the line of the male. But it has not affected in any way the matrilineal structure of their society, for it is only a sister's son who is entitled to get this important position. It has only affected in a limited way the rule of residence after marriage for the men of the royal or chiefly clans only.

The man of the Amchong clan of Nambor does not usually leave his house of birth after marriage, as he marries within his own village. The rule of residence in the case of this clan is that man should not marry outside his own village. The reason for such endolocal residence after marriage is that the men of Amchong clan are eligible to become the chief in the village. When a chief dies, his eldest sister's son gets the position, but if he goes out of the village he forefeits this right.

This rule of succession of the chief is similar to that obtaining among the Khasis, but there is a difference in the pattern of residence after marriage. In the latter society, the chief or *syiem* does live with his wife after marriage. It is not necessary for him to change his residence from his to his wife's. When he is selected for succession, it is enjoined upon him that he should attend the council of elders for discussion of important matters about administration of land or disputes in the village of his birth.

It is likely that in the past the Lalung chief lived in the house of his wife and attended the meetings of the council of

elders in the village of his mother as is the present practice among the Khasis. Where the people of his native village and that of his wife were the same, the chief was not required to go out of his village of uxorial residence to attend his duties.

The change from the original residence pattern in case of men of the chiefly or the royal families among the Lalungs probably resulted from historical causes. The Lalung society passed through a long period of conflict with the Jaintias, Ahoms, Kacharis and Koches. When the clans were displaced from their original habitat a large number of clans lost their original integration and settled in the plains, forming clusters under the leadership of dominant clans. In the process, the dominant clans could retain their supremacy only if their chiefs did not go out of their village after marriage. The men of the Amchong clan at Nambor may marry outside provided they bring their wives to their own village.

Marriage between the clans of different clusters is confined within the village. On actual counting of one hundred and fifty-eight marriages effected in the two living generations in the village of Nambor, it has been found that only in twenty-six cases partners were from outside. But of the thirteen clans, only eight were involved in such marriages. The smaller clans did not go in for spouses out of their village or if they did, the distance was not more than sixteen kilometers. It is the larger clans, namely, Amchong, Madur and Ladur, that have brought spouses from distant villages as far as twenty kilometers away. But such marriages also are few and far between.

A slight difference in the incidence of marriages with distant villages is noticeable between the two living generations in Nambor. In the older, marriages were affected in villages lying closer whereas in the younger, spouses were from villages which were on average six kilometers away. This change came when improved communications made it possible for the people of Nambor to travel greater distances in one day. But it is not likely that the travelling facilities alone would provide enough incentive for marrying outside one's own village. Neither the boys nor the girls can normally have free contacts with young people of other villages.

Marriage seldom takes place between a boy and a girl who are unknown to each other. In the same village, boys can meet the girls as they go to the fields to work or as they play outdoor games in groups. Once a boy picks up familiarity with a

girl it soon develops into intimacy, and the boy starts visiting her at night without disturbing others. The parents of the girl may know of the liaison but they prefer to close their eyes to it if they approve of the boy. On the occasion of the spring festival, Bihu, it is a custom for the girls in every house to weave stoles for their fathers and brothers. At this time, she makes extra pieces for presenting them to her lover. The mother knows from this with whom she has fallen in love. There is not much secrecy about it, and if the boy decides to marry, he gives back the stole presented to him by the girl.

When the stole is given back by the boy to his beloved as an indication of his decision to marry her, they fix a date between themselves, keeping about a week in hand, in which the boy comes to live with her in her house, either on a Sunday or Wednesday.

On the day of marriage, the parents of the girl prepare rice-beer. Since they have known about the arrival of the boy about a week ahead, they get ample time to make the preparations. The boy calls at the house of his would be the parents-in-law at night, when the village has gone to sleep. The parents of the girl wait for the arrival of the boy and when he enters the courtyard, the father comes out and conducts him inside and makes him sit at the place where food is served and taken. Immediately after the boy has been so received by the parents-in-law, a male kinsman is despatched to the headman, to break the news and to bring him to the house along with some elders of the village.

They too as they come are served with rice-beer. The father presents the boy who has taken residence in his house as his son-in-law. The headman asks the boy whether he has come of his own accord or there has been any compulsion to bring him in the house. The boy replies that he has come of his own accord and there has not been any compulsion to bring him in the house.

The headman then asks the girl, who is in the next room where the food is cooked, if she is willing to accept the boy as her husband. On getting her assent the headman calls her and the boy to approach together to receive their blessings.

It is a custom that after one or two days of marriage the bride goes to her parents-in-law, taking rice-beer and areca nuts and betels as presents for them. On this occasion an elder

kinswoman accompanies her. They set off early in the morning. When the bride arrives at the house of her parents-in-law the mother-in-law shuts the door of the kitchen and dining house (*borghar*), where she would go. The bride keeps on waiting at the door of the borghar for some time. When the mother-in-law sees that the girl is not willing to depart, she opens the door and lets her in along with the escort. The bride first of all keeps the pot of rice-beer and the packets of the areca nuts and betels on the floor close to the wall which partitions the room into two, one for cooking and the other for dining. They take their seat in the dining room by their presents and wait for the arrival of the groom. In the evening, the groom comes to the house of his parents. By this time close kinsmen of the clan in which he is born have arrived. Among them there is a kinsman called a borjela.

He is an immediate or classificatory mother's brother to the groom. It is essential that he should be in the house of the groom when the latter follows his bride, the first time after the marriage. All the invited kinsmen including the borjela and the groom and his parents take their seat on the floor in the dining room. The borjela takes off the plug from the mouth of the pot of rice-beer and pours a few drops from it as offering to the god Mahadev, and other lesser deities, namely, the four holy brothers (*Chari-Bhai*) and the tiger king (*Baghraja*). A few drops are also offered in the same way to the presiding deities of land, water and air. Then he opens the packets of areca nuts and betels and counts them. It is a rule that the bride should bring one whole nut and a betel for each of original sisters of the Lalung clans. The number is either five or seven according to the group of five or seven original sisters.

The borjela examines whether the areca nuts and betels are of the number of original sisters of the group of clans to which the clan of the groom is affiliated to. If he finds it correct, he puts them on a banana leaf spread in the middle of the room. He pours over them a few drops of the rice-beer as oblation to the original sisters.

After the borjela has finished his oblatory rites the groom and the bride pays their respect to him and to the kinsmen present there by bowing down before them. The borjela blesses them and enjoins upon them to lead a happy and quiet married life. The bride then retires to another room, where food is cooked. The borjela now serves rice-beer to all present in the dining

room. He cuts the areca nuts and distributes pieces to all along with betels. The formalities are over with this.

The bride and the groom do not remain in the borghar after the guests and kinsmen have left. They go back to their house on the same day. Before the groom starts with his bride for the house of his mother-in-law his parents give hand-woven stoles and wrappers as presents for his parents-in-law.

The coming of the bride to the house of the parents of her husband for the first time and her formal acceptance by them on that day is known as *nokachinaliwana,* that is, the setting of the first step by the bride to a new house after her marriage.

The parents of the bride visit the house of the parents of their son-in-law after about a month from the formal acceptance of their daughter by them. They go there by appointment on a day which is usually a wednesday or sunday. They take rice-beer and betels and areca nuts and rice-cakes as presents. They go early in the morning and come back the same day. But they may halt there for a night if the distance between the two villages is too long to be covered in one day. They receive a warm welcome there. After an exchange of formal goodwill with the parents-in-law of their son they dine together.

When a man goes to live with his wife after marriage, it does not mean that he severs of all social relations with his parents. He and his wife have no claim on their first born. When the child grows up, the parents-in-law of the bride take it to their house. But this social obligation can be redeemed by giving symbolical presents. This is called *kush-singa.*

It is done on an appointed day intimated to the parents of the husband in advance. On that day the wife sets off with her husband for the house of her parents-in-law, accompanied by certain close kins and her borjela. They carry with them two red fowls and a packet of betels and areca nuts. It contains as many nuts and leaves as are the number of the original sisters of the group to which the clan of the husband belongs. They also take with them an equal number of coins and a pot of rice-beer.

On arrival they are taken into the house. The borjela of the husband who is already there with elder male kinsmen of the clan of his birth receives the presents brought by the couple. Then they all go to an open space on the edge of the village for a feast. The husband's parents contribute the rice and a black

goat on this occasion. No woman other than the bride may go with the party. Before the meal is taken, the borjela invokes blessings of the god Mahadev by dropping a little quantity of rice-beer on the ground. The couple receive from the borjela the divine grace by bowing down before him.

At the end of the feast, all the participants are given areca nuts and betels. The borjela then takes a blade of *kush,* a kind of grass that grows wild on wet land and breaks it into two and declares in the presence of all that the son of the family has taken up residence in the house of his wife and so has gone to the "world" of his wife. Henceforward he will have no right of consanguinity in the family of his birth.

Usually, the husband and the wife go back to their village on the same day, but they may stay on for a night if the distance cannot be covered in one day.

The kush-singa has a symbolic meaning. The blade of kush grass stands for the lineal continuity of a clan. So when, after marriage, a man goes to live with his wife he gives up his right to transmit to his children primary lineal consanguinity of the clan of his birth.

When a woman takes her residence in the house of her husband, she is also required to sever her membership from the clan of her birth, by performing kush-singa. There is no definite time or auspicious day when the kush-singa is done but it should not be kept pending too long and surely not beyond the attainment of puberty by the first issue of the marriage. Usually, it is done on the occasion of a mortuary rite performed periodically after five or six years.

If the kush singa is delayed beyond a reasonable time the parents of the spouse who has changed the residence after marriage take away the first born grandchild to their house. The child who is thus taken by the grandparents to their house and is adopted by them is known as *jontana,* that is, one who has been pulled in. The parents of this child will not be responsible for its up bringing and marriage.

There are cases, however, when the first-born is not taken by the parents of the person, who has left the house of birth after marriage. But even in such a case the grandparents do not give up their interest in the child. They must be consulted when their first-born grandson or granddaughter is going to be married. Their permission has to be obtained before the

marriage, and they have to be kept informed of all the steps of the procedure.

The social formalities and performance vary with the manner in which marriage takes place. The theory is that marriage should be arranged by the parents. But in practice a boy leaves his house and takes up residence in the house of his wife without any knowledge or prior consent of his parents. The kush-singa ceremony is necessary when a boy marries by himself. His father-in-law and his bride do not object to it. It is a social obligation, which is shared between the wife, the husband and his parents-in-law.

When a marriage is arranged by the parents, it is the groom who goes first to his wife's house with his kinsmen. They carry with them their own food and rice-beer, betels and areca-nuts as presents for the mother of the girl. The groom's party stays there a day but may return on the same day if the distance can be covered by nightfall. The groom pays a visit to his parental house after one day or two, and returns to the wife after a stay of a couple of days.

The wife also visits the house of the parents-in-law for a closer acquaintance with them. Her borjela accompanies her. But he does not stay there if it is possible to return on the same day. The husband may also join the party and comes back with her. The groom's mother remains formally unaware of his marriage, so long he does not go with his wife. He does so only when he learns that his mother has allowed her to enter the house.

The kush-singa is not performed in marriages through negotiation between two families. The two borjelas, that is, one belonging to the clan of the bride and the other to that of the groom, meet at the borghar in the house of the bride and ratify the marriage by exchanging formal presents of betels and areca-nuts.

There are two important sociological rules of marriage in the Lalung society. First, though a man may go to live with his wife by arranging marriage on his own initiative, his mother does not recognise it until the kush-singa is performed. Else she has a claim on the first issue of the marriage, by way of compensation, as it were, for the loss to her household caused by the departure of her son to a different family. The mother of a girl may have had known whom her daughter was

going to marry. For the girl makes a secret of it. After she comes to know about it, she makes a formal proposal to the mother of the boy who has proposed marriage to her daughter. If the mother of the boy accepts the proposal, the marriage comes through.

The negotiated marriage in which the boy goes to live with the wife after a formal ratification by the two families is the norm conforming to the social ideology.

Secondly, with the post-marital change of residence a man is socially identified with the family of his wife. This is formally pronounced by his own or classificatory mother's brother, who is called borjela, after an exchange of areca-nuts and betels with his counterpart, that is, the borjela of his nephew's wife. But such a change does not indicate a complete break of all social ties between a married man and the family of his birth.

As a brother he has certain social obligations towards his sister's family. Though he goes out of the family after marriage and lives with a different household, he is called upon to help whenever the sister has any difficulty in managing her affairs, such as the management of land or settlement of disputes over division of land among the sisters. Besides, he has to perform certain rites when the first issue is born to his sister and to escort his nephew at the house of his wife at the time of marriage as the representative of the clan of his birth.

The birth of a child in the family is a very happy occasion. When a woman conceives after marriage, she is looked upon by her parents, husband and other kinsmen in the village with affection and respect. She also feels a pride in it. Her mother takes good care of her. She, however, is not allowed to stay idle. She goes on with domestic work as usual. The idea is that if she does not do any work, she will have a difficult delivery. Her mother and her husband keep a close but loving watch on her work and movements. She is not to kill any bird such as fowl or duck for food, nor to dress fish or kill pig or other animals such as snake or lizard. She may go out but should not cross any culvert or bridge or go near the cremation grounds. The belief behind such restrictions is that if she kills any animal or bird its spirit may cause harm to the embryo. And cremation grounds and bridges are haunted by evil spirits who might cause mishap.

At the time of birth of the child, the mother stays in the living room or in a separate compartment of the house. A bed is made for her on the floor where she lies on her back. A little away, by the wall on one side of the room, a small wood-fire is kept burning. A tiny piece of iron is put in it as a protection of the mother and the child to be born, from the evil spirits. It is believed that spirits are afraid of iron. The iron becomes red-hot and its fumes impregnates the iron of the room, along with the heat of the fire. The spirits, it is believed, smell it and do not dare enter the room. An additional protection is by fixing branches of thorny trees across the entrance to the room or at the openings for ventilations in the wall to keep evil spirits from coming in.

When labour starts, the husband of the woman or any other man of her clan goes round the village to tell all the heads of the households of his clan about it. This is done to forewarn the members of the clan not to touch their granaries after the delivery. As soon as the news of an expected delivery is received all the families concerned take out from their granaries as much paddy as they would require for about seven days. During these seven days, they are not to attend any ritual that may be performed in the houses of other clans in the village.

The mother is helped by two or three women at the time of delivery. They sit by her and tell her not to set scared about it. If the child is a boy, they strike a brass pot or a similar thing to ring out the happy news to the members of the family waiting outside. If it is a girl, the attending women ululate in joy and merriment. The placenta is detached with a sharp strip of bamboo, wrapped in a banana leaf in the shape of a tiny barrel and given to the father. He puts its into a hallow bamboo, plugs its open end with leaves and bury it deep in a vertical position in a corner of the household premises. The baby is washed in tepid water. Its mother also takes a wash, and for this she comes out of the house.

The new born baby is not brought out in the open for seven days, after which the house is cleaned and all the inmates take bath and wash their clothes. The borjela of the child places a big banana leaf in front of the door of the room in which the child was born. On it he puts a few leaves of the sacred basil, stalks of green grass and a quantity of rice. He prays to four deities, namely, Narayana (Nareshwar), Goreshwar (Ananta), Mahadev (Hemeshwar) and Yam (Dharmeshwar) for happiness

and long life of the baby. As the rites are conducted the mother with the new born baby on her lap, sits in the room facing the borjela who has taken his seat on the outer side of the door. After the oblations have been offered, the borjela takes the baby from the lap of its mother, holds it against his breast and comes out in the courtyard. If it is a boy, a small toy bow and an arrow made specially for the occasion are placed in its hands. Holding the baby close to his breast, the borjela makes a show of wielding the tiny weapon and discharges the arrow four times, once in each direction, east, north, south and west. This is to make the child a good warrior and a strong man though the Lalungs are no longer a fighting race. It merely expresses the expectation that the child should be brave and is a survival of tradition of living in the past.

However, there is an important difference in case of a girl. The borhari, who is the seniormost female descendant of the original family of the mahari or clan and is the mother's eldest sister, immediate or classificatory to the baby, performs the rites instead of the borjela but under his supervision. The girl is given a mineature bow made to represent the apparatus used for ginning cotton. If such an article cannot be made, a sickle is taken by the borhari and with its wooden handle in the hand of the child, she turns in four directions one after another bowing her head each time as a mark of honour to the deities.

Here, the rite symbolizes the desire of the parents that she should be good in her household work specially in weaving cloth from home-spun yarn and in agricultural work, namely, reaping of paddy. The borjela and borhari and the women who have helped the mother at the time of delivery are treated to a repast of chicken and rice-beer at the end of the rite.

Though the borjela lives with his wife as a member of her clan, he maintains his link with his natal clan through such performances of the social and ritual responsibilities at the time of birth and marriage of his sisters' children. The borjela is not a relationship term. It signifies a particular structural position of the first-born male in the matrilineal family, which has descended from the original ancestress of a clan in the village. As an elder brother in the sphere of consanguine relationship he is distinguished by another term, *khai,* and in relationship with the descending generation, other than his own children, that is with the children of his sisters and brothers, he is the

momai. Conversly, the siblings in the lower generations are *pagin* to him.

The borjela represents in every generation a particular line of male descent in the matrilineal clan. *Jela* is the word for the masculine sex and *bor* means big or senior. Thus, borjela means the person who is the eldest male in the family of birth.

Every family has a borjela, but normally the social and ceremonial responsibilities do not devolve on him. These are the duties of the borjela of the clan. He belongs to the family in which the original line of female descent of the clan is traced. Only when he is not present in the village or unable to come to the place of ceremony from the village of his wife, the borjela of the family is called in to conduct the social and ceremonial rites as the male representative of his sister's children. The distinction between the borjela of the family and that of the clan is that while the former has only domestic responsibilities towards his sisters, for solving disputes on division of land or management of the property, the latter bears the ceremonial and social responsibilities as the male head of the clan to all its members on the occasions of post-natal rites and marriage. The involvement of the *borjela of the family* to his sisters originates from a sense of uterine and consanguine kinship. But the structural position of the *borjela of the clan* is different. Along with the sister through whom the primal as well as ultimate female descent of the clan is traced, he as the senior male colateral, represents its male lineality. In other words, he is the male element in the *endogeneity* of the womb.

But the borjela does not represent an uninterupted line of a male descent in the clan of his birth. For in every generation he goes out and marries in a different clan where his children adopt the clan of his wife. On the other hand, the borhari represents the consanguine and traditional line of female descent in the clan of her birth.

As a sibling the borhari is the female counterpart of the borjela in the level of generation. The word hari means the feminine sex and line of descent, which, combined with bor, means the seniormost female colateral in the family. Like the term borjela, it does not signify any particular kin relationship. It represents a particular line of female descent that is the line of the eldest female colateral. But unlike the borjela she represents the uninterupted line of female descent in the family and the clan. When she represents the senior line of female

descent in a clan she shares the special responsibilities along with the borjela of the clan. She ratifies every marriage in the house of the bride by accepting the formal present of areca-nuts and betels. When the borjela and borhari grow old and infirm, their functions can be conducted by the next junior colaterals of the same generation in the order of birth. The borjela and borhari are the seniormost members in the clan.

After marriage a Lalung couple constitutes a single household. The wife gets land from her mother to build a new house. If there are more than one sister in a family the parents decide with whom to live when they grow old, the choice preferably being the youngest. The decision is taken by the mother. In such an important matter she consults her elder brother or the borjela. Normally, the parents do not move out of the household which they have built. As the sons and elder daughters marry, they separate from the family of birth. But the youngest daughter stays in the house in which she has been born. She is given a larger share of the family land than her elder sisters.

A married woman may not give away any land so received without the approval of her mother and elder brother. The mother's brother, that is, the borjela is not concerned with the use of the land nor with the agricultural activities. He comes in only when the land is to be divided or sold out. In absence of the mother's brother these responsibilities devolve on the elder brother of the woman. Her husband tends the land and puts it to the best agricultural use to meet the needs of the family, but he has not jural control over it or its produce and cannot sell either.

In the smaller circle of the family the borjela cannot absolve himself from the social duties and obligations towards his sisters and nieces. The Lalungs have clear and definite conception about the constitution of the individual or nuclear family in relation to the position of the mother's brother or borjela in it.

Besides, the siblings the house or *noh* of the nuclear family has one secondary and two primary members, namely, the borjela and the *kunori* and *kabi*. These terms signify their structural distinctions and positions in the family. As has been noted, the borjela is the senior male colateral in the oldest generation through whom the virile consanguinity of the clan is counted. He represents the senior male element of descent in

the clan, and as such he is distinguished by the qualifying term of bor that is the big jela or male. But in the inner circle of family he is the senior brother. The term borjela as such does not primarily carry the import of kin relationship. It mainly signifies the structural position of the senior male in the level of a generation in the family or in the clan.

Kunori is the term for the youngest female sibling. The elder brother distinguishes her as *harikunori,* that is, the youngest female of his generation. But the term kabi means the youngest brother-in-law which is not essentially a structural term like borjela and harikunori. It particularises the relationship of the husband of the youngest sister to her senior brother. From the stand point of the borjela, the kabi has no structural significance in the generation of the sibling.

The borjela is not a member of the nuclear family of his sister, which is constituted by herself, her husband and children. The links with his sister's family is limited to the socio-economic obligations he bears to her and her children. This relationship emanates from the belief in a unity through birth from the same mother or the womb. The brother and the sister who are born of the same mother have a deep consanguine bonds between them as they believe that they are of the same flesh and blood. Though the brother goes to live with his wife and becomes the member of another family in a different clan, it does not on that account sever his consanguine bonds with the family of his birth. Structurally, the borjela is not a member of the nuclear family of her sister, but as a member of the same uterine family, he is, as it were, the male head of the household in socio-economic and ritual fold. In the domestic sphere of the nuclear family, the borjela of the clan does not bear socio-economic status except those on the occasions of marriage and birth of the siblings.

The husband in the nuclear family has no claim to the property. His main responsibility is to bear the economic responsibility of the family and to manage the household as an integrated economic unit. As the kabi, he has an exclusive term to distinguish the relationship of the borjela with him. He calls the borjela as *chalarou.* By this term he specifies the borjela as the elder brother of his wife. *Sui* and *Si* are the two terms used by the husband and the wife for each other. Though the husband becomes a member in the matrilineal family of his wife and lives in the house which belongs to his mother-in-law

or to his wife, his consanguine identity of birth is not merged in the clan of his wife. In his relationship with the parents-in-law, he is not equated by them to their siblings. He is distinguished by them as *changoi,* which means the male who has married in the family and living as the husband of the daughter. The changoi refers his mother-in-law as *niw* and father-in-law as *hu*. But he calls or addresses his parents-in-law by the same term as used by his wife for her parents (*see* Appendix I).

These purely relationship terms have bearing on the kinship and so do not come into conflict with the terms borjela, borhari and harikunori which have got special structural significance.

Conception of the Lalung family at the structural level involves three social entities, namely, the jela, the hari and the kabi. Here jela and hari mean the male and the female respectively who have been born from a common mother. The structural unity between them is uterine. The jela retains this unity during his life time, though he goes to live with his wife and is identified matrimonially with her clan. The social identity of a Lalung man as a brother is never lost in the matrilineal family of his birth. His procreational consanguinity with it is recognised only to limited extent. The lineal unity of the family and clan descends through the sister in every generation.

This unity of sibling of the opposite sexes is not merely structural. It expresses also a particular view about the continuity of life in which the mother, as the bearer of children, is taken as the main spring in the procreational process. The continuity of the line of life in every generation is through the female. In the generation of sibling, this unity lies in the birth from a common mother. The kabi occupies a middle position between the brother and the sister. He has no structural position in the matrilineal conception of birth. The brother only sees in him the man who has married his sister. The brother-in-law comes in the family and lives with the sister of the jela to cause birth of children for the lineal continuity of life in the female line.

The husband is not recognised as the head of his family. When the mother-in-law resides in the house, she is the head of the family. The wife takes that place on the death of her mother. In the nuclear family the husband plays the role of a procreator and rearer of the children borne to him by his wife. He lives with his wife forming a separate economic unit but

cannot control or claim any exclusive right over the property and land, because they belong to his wife.

In the married man's view the family at generation level of his wife is structured with himself, his wife and her elder brother, as a secondary member in it, for he is not a resident of the family house or noh.

This concept is symbolically represented in the structural plan of the bachelors' dormitory where the three main posts supporting the ridge pole are known by the same terms, namely, harikunori, borkabi and borjela used for the youngest sister, the brother-in-law and the senior brother respectively. The superlative expression of bor or great which precedes the word kabi is eulogistically used by the dormitory boys about his procreative role in the family.

The siblings of the same mother constitute a stratified level of generation. The brother-in-law enters this level as a procreator without affecting the lineal unity of the sibling. In the creation of human life it is the mother who forges the consanguine bond between the siblings. It is in her womb that the life infused by the procreator takes shape in flesh and blood. The womb of the mother is important because it is in her that life takes a concrete form and so maintains continuity generation after generation.

This idea of unity between children of the opposite sexes attained through birth from the same mother, forms the basis of the matrilineal structure of the Lalung society. The Khasi, who are also matrilineal, has a similar concept. Their belief is that the mother produces the kind or species. And this kind or *'ka jaid'* springs from the mother and remains in the man's house of birth and is continued by his sister and his niece (Roy 1938 : 124). All persons who spring from the same womb are one kind, as they are suckled at the same breast. They cannot inter-marry as they are of the same womb.

But consanguinity does not centre round the female element exclusively. It is the male seed that grows in the womb. In this way, the persons of same womb, that is, those who are 'ka jaid' are also connected or 'strung into one umbilical cord generated by the male element'.

When a man goes to live with his wife after marriage he does not forsake his own *jaid* or kind which is none but the clan. He has a house with his wife but his home still remains

where he has been born. The relationship between a man and his jaid persists even after his death. According to the indigenous Khasi custom, the final resting place for the mortal remains a man is the burial place of the family of birth. In recent times, there has been a change in this custom. The Christian Khasis do not inter the bones of the dead man in the ossuary of the clan of birth.

When a man begets children by his wife, he maintains his consanguine relationship with them as the producer of a common umbilical chain which binds his children together. They belong to the jaid or kind of his wife being born of her womb, but they are bound also with their father through umbilical bond produced by him in the womb of their mother.

The feeling of consanguinity is thus attained through the birth from a common womb, but it is also extended to the progeny of the brother through his umbilical consanguinity. As a result, the Khasis restrict marriage between cross cousins, even though they belong to different clans or jaids. Essentially, the Lalung and the Khasis have the same concept of unity of birth between the siblings of opposite sexes. Like the Khasis, the Lalungs also do not approve cross cousin marriage.

The Khasis believe that cross cousin marriages are visited by misfortune and do not prosper. Such marriages, however, are tolerated only after the death of the uncle (Roy 1938 : 130), when he will be saved from the embarrassment of being a father-in-law to the child of his sister. It is improper for the persons of the same clan to be the related through marriage.

Primarily the consanguine bond or feeling of being of the same kind descends through the female line. But the procreational consanguinity of the male is also recognised to a certain extent. Children have primary consanguine bonds through their mother, but at the same time they are related, in a secondary way, through the bond of the umbilical cord to the family in which their father has been born.

In structural and consanguine solidarity of a generation of sibling, the Lalung and the Khasi societies are essentially based on the concept of birth from a common mother or womb. But the Garos, who are also matrilineal, differ from them in certain respects. They share the same consanguine unity between the siblings through the matrilineal line, but it is not extended through the male sibling to the family of his procreation. In

other words, the secondary consanguine bonds does not bind the siblings of the brothers and sisters born from the same womb.

Cross cousin marriage is preferred among the Gaors. The Garo clans are broadly divided into three exogamous divisions, and cross cousin marriage virtually implies a rigid form of exchange of spouses between two *maharis,* belonging to different exogamous divisions. A Garo prefers his son marrying the daughter of his sister, who has inherited the property of the family of his birth.

The smallest exogamous divisions of the Garos is the mahari, which includes kins related through the mother. A number of maharis constitute a machong and all the clans or machongs in their turn are classified into a tripartite exogamous division, namely, Sangma, Marak and Momin. A man cannot marry in the mahari of his mother and for that matter in the machong and the exogamous division to which it belongs. Machong has a territorial affiliation as it refers to the village of the mother. Many machongs have migrated from their original habitats and consequently the significance of the territorial affiliation is lost to a considerable extent.

Since a man cannot marry in the mahari to which he belongs by birth, he takes wife from his father's clan. She is a cross cousin, that is, his mother's brother's daughter. In the next generation, the siblings belong to the mahari of his wife and they will marry in the mahari in which he is born. In this way, marriage goes on between the two maharis. A Garo man even after marriage retains certain obligations towards his sister's family. He comes in the picture, when disputes arise over land between his nieces. It is his duty to settle them. Otherwise his consanguine bond with the family of birth practically comes to an end. When he dies the funeral takes place in his wife's village, in the burial ground of her clan.

In the Garo society, matrilineal consanguinity is the recognised basis of classification for the exogamous, inter-marrying maharis. But it descends only in the female line and is not extended laterally through the male sibling as he goes to marry in another clan. On this difference of the idea of consanguinity between the matrilineal Khasis and the Lalungs on the one hand and the Garos on the other, cross cousin marriage among the latter does not militate against their lineal solidarity. The idea of consanguine solidarity of the sibling born of the same

womb is not present among the Garos, but there is a certain kind of structural solidarity built upon the basis of a dual control over the immovable economic possessions between the siblings of the opposite sexes. A girl who inherits the house and property from her mother must marry her cross cousin that is her father's sister's son. This cousin belongs to a different mahari and machong, to that in which her father was born. In the following generation also the female sibling who gets the property marries the cousin who is her father's sister's son belonging to the same clan in which her father's mother's brother was born. The control over the immovable property, that is land and house, continues through the cross cousins in each generation between two maharis, bringing unity in the marriage structure.

This unity is different in conception and kind from that existing between the siblings of the opposite sexes found in the Lalung and the Khasi societies. The former pervades the transmission and control of property between two families of different maharis, whereas among the latter it is purely consanguinal, discarding marriage between cross cousins of the opposite sexes. In the Grao society, the maharis are divided into three intermarrying groups, but when the control of property is involved only two exogamous maharis are bound together in a structural duality, establishing consanguine relationship through marriage between the families of procreation of the siblings of the opposite sexes. In the Lalung and the Khasi societies, there is a lineal duality between the siblings of the opposite sexes, but it remains confined within the family of birth. The female element maintains the consanguine lineality in the descending order of birth. The male element that is the male sibling also carries it from the womb of his mother to the family of his procreation, and this forges a common link between the cross cousins to the womb of their grandmother. Marriage between the siblings of the opposite sexes, therefore, is avoided on consanguine grounds, and consequently the clans are not grouped into any rigid classification of inter-marrying maharis, forming the basis for cross cousin marriage, as found among the Garos.

Structurally, there is no difference between the Lalung, Khasi and the Garo societies in so far as the descent in family and its affiliation to clan is traced through the mother. The difference lies in the extension of the degree of consanguinity through the male element. In the Lalung and the Khasi

societies, the man stands between his families of birth and procreation as a consanguine link, whereas in the Garo society the man has practically no such consanguine position.

In the Lalung society, the siblings of brothers and sisters, without distinction of sex, are designated by a single kinship term, namely, *pagin*. This term also includes the cross cousins of the second order. But such a classification of the kinship terms between the siblings of brother and sister is not found among the Garos. The Garo man distinguishes the siblings of his brother by the same terms, namely, *depante* and *demchik,* as he uses for his own son and daughter respectively. Similarly, sisters use these terms for their own descendants (Burling 1956 : 204-5).

But the brothers and the sisters do not classify their siblings as their own descendants as done by the brothers or the sisters between themselves. The sons of the brother and the sister have the same kinship term, namely, *gree*. Similarly, the daughters of the brother and the sister are known as *namchik*. This system of classification of the male and the female siblings of the brother and the sister is an expression of the type of cross cousin marriage practised by the Garos. The parallel cousin always belongs to the same clan or *machong* and as such they are classified as one's own children or descendants. On the other hand, the cross cousins belong to two different clans and so they are marriageable, that is, a *namchik* can marry a *depante* and a *gree* can marry a *demchik*.

The children of the brother and the sister are distinguished as two separate classes of kins as they belong to two different clans, the sister's child to her own clan and the brother's to his wife's clan, without consanguine bonds between them. On the other hand, the classification of the children of the sibling of the brother and the sister, into one class of kins, namely, pagin the Lalungs, can be taken as an evidence for the absence of cross cousin marriage.

The absence of cross cousin marriage in the Lalung society can be ascribed to the consanguine and structural unity existing between the male and the female siblings born of the same womb or mother. Through the male sibling the consanguinity is transmitted to his own children, as he represents that kind of bond which is connected to the umbilical cord that is the bonds of birth through the male progenitor. In this concept of consanguine relationship, there are similarities between

the Lalungs and the Khasis. But there are certain differences in the emphasis or importance between the senior and junior male and female siblings in the two societies.

In the Khasi family, the youngest daughter gets a larger share of the property as in the descending order of birth she is the ultimate colateral who is to render certain customary religious services for the departed men and women of her clan. The youngest daughter in the Lalung family has a similar position in so far as the parents reside with her till their death. But she has no consanguine position in the order of birth as the ultimate sibling of a generation. This place is occupied by the senior colateral in the living generation, the *borhari*.

The borhari as the senior female representative of a clan acts as a witness in the marriage at the house of the bride. It is also her duty to conduct the birth rites of every girl born in her clan. This kind of socio-religious importance of the senior female colateral is not found in the Khasi society. On the other hand in the Garo society, the senior female in the family has a structural importance, but qualitatively it differs from that of the Lalungs. The old parents in the Garo family generally prefer to stay with their senior daughter, who inherits the house and a larger share of land than her junior sisters. The senior female in the Lalung society does not get a larger share of the family property nor do her parents generally stay in their old ages with her.

In transmission of property and lineal seniority and consanguinity a distinction is made in the Lalung family between the senior and the junior daughters. In the division of property, the youngest daughter gets a preference both in the Lalung and the Khasi societies. There is also a lineal emphasis on consanguine bonds among the latter in the youngest daughter. But this emphasis is accorded to the senior females both in the Lalung and the Garo societies. In the structuring of matrilineal consanguinity, the Lalungs stand between the Khasis on the one hand and the Garos on the other.

Certain functions and obligations of the elder brother towards the sisters are common in all these three societies. The Garo mother's brother has an important position in the family of his birth. His sister's daughter looks upon him for aid in settling disputes that arise in the division of property in the family. If it is not settled easily then all the males born in the same mahari assemble in a meeting and thrash out the issue.

The mother's brother always maintains an abiding interest on the property of the family of his birth as his own son marries his sister's daughter and acquires a direct interest in its management.

The mother's senior brother in the Lalung and the Khasi societies have similar obligations towards his sister but these are derived from the consanguine unity of birth from a common womb. The sister's husband has no right in the management of the property as found among the Garos. This difference in the participations of husband in the management of the property inherited by his wife is an echo of the difference of consanguinity among them. The Garo husband by marrying his cross cousin enters in the family of his procreation as the representative of his father. Here the consanguine unity is shifted from the family of birth to that of procreation through the marriage of the siblings of the opposite sexes.

Though the structural position of mother's brother is similar in the Khasi and the Lalung societies, the lineal emphasis of consanguinity in the line of the male is perhaps stronger in the latter society. The Lalung elder brother represents the male lineality in every generation. He is the borjela, and in this capacity he conducts the rituals of birth and ratifies the marriage of his nephews and nieces. Such sociological emphasis of the mother's brother is not found in the Khasi society though by birth he remains in the clan or *kur* of his mother notwithstanding his marriage in another clan.

The two most important sociological criteria for the borjela are that : (i) he should be the son of a man who went to live in the house of wife and that, (ii) he should himself be the man who has taken up his residence in the house of his wife after marriage. This system of lineal emphasis on the male in a matrilineal society would have led to cross cousin marriage as found among the Garos, but the Lalung conception of consanguine bond between the brother and the sister stands against such a possibility. The emphasis on the consanguinity transmitted through the male is further extended to the cousins of the second order and as such marriage between them is also forbidden. A Lalung not only avoids marrying in his mother's clan, but at the same time he cannot marry his cousins of the second order related to him through the father, though they belong to different clans. The cousins of the first and second orders are distinguished by the same term, namely, *pagin*.

Selection of mates is circumscribed by two kinds of consanguine restrictions. First, the marriage partner must come from a clan other than that of the mother. Secondly, the first cousins and those of second order who are related through the father are forbidden for marriage. The implications of these prohibitory rules are that the marriage mate comes from a third clan other than two clans to which belong the families of birth and procreation of the father.

The consanguine bonds which spring and radiate from the family embrace the members of three living generations. When the ultimate or the youngest daughter is married, she continues to live in the house where she has been born, with her parents. As children are born to her the family extends in the descending generation. The Lalungs term for family is *noh-khonja*. *Noh* means house and *khonja* refers to the kins who live in it, as members of a family, eating from the same hearth.

There is no separate term for nuclear family consisting of husband and wife and their children, which forms the basis of the khonja. The size of the noh-khonja is biologically limited. It cannot possibly consist of a group of kins of four generations, for by the time siblings of the second generation marry and beget children, the grandparents are no longer alive.

When men and women marry they must not get their mates from the khonja into which their fathers have married, for all the siblings of the first and the second generation of those groups will have the consanguine bonds that radiate through the male. On an examination of forty-six marriages in the village of Nambor, where the clans of birth of the parents of the spouses were available, it was found that in forty-three instances the siblings married into clans different from those of their parents. In the three cases, where the siblings married in their father's clans, they belonged to different villages and therefore, to khonjas different from those into which their fathers had married (*see* Appendix II).

Since marriage is not admissible between cousins of the first and the second order, the mates are two generations apart, if one belongs to the clan into which one's father has married. Such a mate will be always outside the noh-khonja into which the father has married. No one can marry in the clan of his mother as that will violate the fundamental rule of exogamy. So the Lalungs marriage axioms are that, (i) the marriage partner must not belong to the clan of the mother and,

(ii) that the cousins of the first and the second order in the clan in which the father has married should not be taken in for marriage, for they form a consanguine circle or class of kins.

In a village, marriageable partners in the clan into which one's father has married would rarely be available. For those who could marry would not be compatible mates in age, being two generations apart in the descending order. In actual practice, therefore, the marriage partners belong to a third group or mahari or clan other than those of birth of either. In other words, one must not marry in the mahari of birth and in which one's father has married. In this context, it would be appropriate to designate the clan or mahari in which one's father has married as patrilateral, in consideration of the differences in consanguinity stressed upon in the marriage rules of the Lalung society. The exogamy is that spouses must avoid both matrilineal and patrilateral clans, to be particular the patrilateral khonja, in marriage.

Structurally the Lalung noh-khonja is identical with the Khasis *shi iing* which is constituted of a grandmother with her daughters and their children. Cross cousin marriage among the Khasis is the least preferred. But among the Lalungs cross cousin marriage is altogether forbidden. Both the Khasis and the Lalungs count on consanguinity through the brother to his children in a different clan. But the Lalungs recognise a distinct male lineality which restricts marriage between cousins of the first and the second orders.

On the basis of the differences in the concept of consanguinity there has been absence, existence and preference of cross cousin marriage among the Lalungs, the Khasis and the Garos respectively. The feeling of unity through birth from a common womb between the brother and the sister is very strong among the Lalungs and the Khasis. The former are comparatively more rigid on it. On the other hand, in the Garo society the male bond of consanguine unity of common birth is not transmitted through his sibling but a structural unity through marriage between the siblings of brothers and the sisters is obtained in the level of procreation. This form of unity binds two exogamous maharis in a marriage continuum, reciprocally necessiating exchange of cross cousins, that is, children of the senior male and female colaterals in each generation.

The Lalung clans or *khuls* are clustered into maharis. But

they are different from those of the Garos in pattern of structuring. The Garo mahari is a smaller unit of the machong or clan. In its smallest composition, it cannot possibly include the matrilineal consanguine kins beyond three generations. The Lalung maharis are larger in size constituting a number of clans, in each of them.

In the plains, the Lalungs have been undergoing changes in the structural pattern of their society. It is not possible to get the depth of time involved in the process of this transformation. An accurate historical assessment is not possible. No such record is maintained anywhere. Only an indirect evaluation of time may be made on the basis of various factors involved in the process. The most important change in the Lalung society has come in the way the marriage partners have taken up their residences.

On an analysis of the residence pattern, clan by clan, in the two living generations in the village of Nambor, it is found that the men prefer to remain in the house of their birth after marriage. This indicates a decline in the system of matrilocal residence. In the first generation, out of one hundred marriages, forty-six men did not leave their houses after marriage. But this trend of change is not confined to the men only. In this generation, twenty-eight women left the noh-khonjas of their birth on marriage and went to live with their husbands. In the next generation, the shift has been more marked. Out of fifty-eight marriages, in thirty cases the men have preferred to remain in the houses of their birth, and in twenty-one cases the women moved to the houses of their husbands. In seven marriages only, men came to live with their wives (*see* Appendix III). If this rate of shift towards virilocal residence continues, in the next, *i.e.,* in the third generation a complete change over from the lingering uxorilocal pattern would be accomplished. When a wife goes to her husband's house, the *kush-singha* ceremony is performed by the borhari in the presence of the borjela. But she retains her consanguine bonds with the *khonja* of her birth. The siblings belong to the clan of the husband that is when the husband has not changed his residence, the children will belong to his clan of birth.

In such a mixed residence pattern, it would appear that the traditional rules of marriage and exogamy have been completely disorganised. Since the Lalungs follow a limited patrilateral exogamy avoiding cross cousin marriage down to the

second generation, they are able to exclude the marriages between the khonjas in which their parents have married. The first consideration in the existing marriage rules in the village of Nambor is that, (i) one is not to marry in the clan in which one's mother, grandmother and great grandmother have been born, even though the traditional pattern of matrilocal residence has been considerably reversed, and (ii) where the clan of the mother cannot be traced beyond the third generation the marriage may take place, avoiding the matrilineal and patrilateral cross cousins of the first and the second order.

It is obvious that the changes in the residence pattern would alter the matrilineal structure on the Lalung clan. On the side of the mother the range of exogamy would be reduced to the consanguine limits of the khonja of her birth. When a woman goes to her husband, she forfeits her claim to the property in the family of birth. The usual practice in this respect is that both the male and the female siblings if they remain in the house of their birth after marriage get equal shares of the family land. The economic holding thus always remains vested in the original khonja or clan, notwithstanding the changes in post-nuptial residences of men and women and subsequent consanguine affiliations of their children to different clans.

The change in the residence pattern can be ascribed to three different factors. One might be that in the Lalung royal house, the man did not change their residence. As the sister's son he was eligible to become king. But this limited consideration of royal descent explains the pattern of residence followed in the royal families only. The intention was to keep the royal consanguinity aloof from that of the commoners.

The other plausible reason is that the men and women of a clan do not want to leave their clans of birth after marriage, lest its numerical strength should decrease. For the clan which is numerically superior is dominant in the village administration of community life. This is deduced from the fact that in the village of Nambor the man and the woman of the numerically superior Amchong clan have rarely gone to other villages after marriage.

But there is a more compelling factor in the process of this change. In the plains, there is a disparity in size of economic holdings between the various clans. The families which have in their possession more land than they can cultivate themselves

do not want to lose their economic advantage by allowing the working hands to go away after marriage. Conversely, those who have not sufficient land for their maintenance would not object to their members going to other families after marriage. It has been noticed in Nambor that the bigger clans which have comparatively large shares of the village land have been able to retain their siblings in their families after marriage.

In spite of the changes in the residence pattern, the matrilineal bias in the Lalung family still continues strong. The borjela and borhari have retained their consanguine positions of seniority in the family and the clan. They are still indispensable on the occasions of marriage and birth. The management of the family lies in the hands of the wife. She is the real guardian of the children.

In the recent years, there has been a move for introducing similar changes in the system of inheritance and residence in the Khasi society. Whether this is the effect of economic or other factors is not yet very clear.

CHAPTER SIX

ECONOMY

Agriculture is the principal means of livelihood of the Lalungs. There are, however, some ecological variations between those living in the hills and those in the plains. Paddy is the main crop of Lalung agriculture. It keeps them engaged for about nine months, with the onset of pre-monsoon showers in the end of March or in early April.

In the plains, the Lalungs share a common pattern of agricultural economy with other communities such as Kacharis, Kaibartas and Naths; but there are differences between them in the organisation of the productive activities. A differential analysis of the economy of the Lalung with those of the other plains communities is not attempted here for, such an evaluation is properly the task of an economist.

The distinctive eco-cultural features of the Lalung economic organisation lie in its corporate activities and inter-dependence between the families living within a village for the satisfaction of the basic needs of food, clothing and housing. An ethnographic analysis of this pattern of livelihood of the plains Lalung is made here, with indication of the basic variations from their counterpart in the hills.

The main productive economy of the Lalung of Nambor is agricultural though certain horticultural crops are also grown and sold for cash. Rice is the only staple food taken throughout the year. A part of it when surplus is sold, but it is not in common practice.

For cultivation of paddy land is utilized during the wet months between April and September. On the first April shower a summer variety of paddy called *ahu* which takes about three months to ripen is sown. But it is not cultivated extensively. It thrives in pre-monsoon rain on lands generally lower in elevation than those on which the winter paddy, commonly known as *sali,* is grown. Though the summer paddy is harvested by the fourth month, no other crop is raised in the same land for the remaining months till the next early monsoon. There is another variety of summer paddy, called *bao,* which is grown on lands where water accumulates during rains or floods. Heavy

inundation with rapid rise of water level cannot destroy it as it grows as fast as the level of water goes up. This variety is not grown extensively.

Sali paddy is the principal winter crop. Its cultivation is comparatively a long process. The seedlings are transplanted from the seedbed in high monsoon of two months from late July to early September. The ears come out after the monsoon and the crop is ready for harvesting in winter. It is reaped before a festival called *Maghhihu* some time in the middle of January.

When time for paddy cultivation draws near the villagers make new wooden ploughs and field levellers or repair the old ones. Iron implements like handbill, hoe, axe, sickle and share of the plough are bought. About fifty years ago these also were made in the village itself by Lalung blacksmiths.

Paddy is not directly sown in the land from which it is hervested. Seedlings are raised on a small plot of land, usually situated near the homestead. It is tilled with hoe by the men, but the seeds are sown by the woman. It takes about a month for the seedlings to grow a foot high ; and during the period the field where the seedlings are to be transplanted are ploughed, at least thrice, followed by levelling with a ladder-like bamboo contraption, drawn over the ground by a pair of bullocks for even distribution of rain water.

The seedlings are taken from the bed in the evening by the men, tied up in sheaves and kept in the open in the courtyard for the night. Transplanting is a task requiring skill and experience and is done by the grown-up women. Once the seedlings have been pulled out, they have to be planted before the sun reaches the zenith, otherwise they do not take root.

The number of women participating in transplantation depends on the size of the field to be sown and the capacity of the householder, for whom they work, to treat them generously with good food, after the completion of the work, normally between six and twelve. More than four grown-up women, both married and unmarried are rarely found in a family or household. Since transplanting has to be completed within the short early hours of the morning, help is sought from the leader of the village dormitory one day ahead, in the evening, for additional working hands from other households in the village. The leader of the dormitory either sends information through the *barikha,*

the village messenger, or goes himself find the workers needed. All the women who are called to the work assemble early the real morning in the house of the family on whose land they are to work. The group sets off at sunrise, with the seedlings. The older men accompany them and stay with them, ready to help in levelling the land again, if necessary.

The women start transplantations in a line from one side of the plot, moving backwards. Each takes a few sheaves in her left hand and puts in, at each sowing, two or three seedlings together. A step backward is taken after three sowings at equal distances, about nine inches apart from one another, each in successive line being at a point in the centre of the intervening blank space in the proceeding line. This is done rapidly but adroitly. As the girls fall back putting in the seedlings, each makes sure that she does not fall behind or goes faster in the work. Once they start it does not take them more than two to three hours to finish it. From the field, they go back at noon to the house of the person for whom they have worked, where food is ready for them. The menu normally consists of fine rice and chicken cooked with sliced stalks of banana pith.

The working group of the young girls in the village is called *hadari khel*. Whenever any help is needed by a house in agricultural work like sowing or harvesting, normally done by the women, the changdoloi provides them through the *hadarikhal* Since the changdoloi is the *de jure* leader of the youngmen, both married and unmarried, of his village, he can, by virtue of his position, take the initiative in getting women helpers from the different houses in village. But when he himself requires help from the boys or girls, he brings it to the notice of the headman that is the doloi and goes on with his work. The headman takes a note of it and makes sure that the changdoloi has not misused his power and position. The village headman has no executive jurisdiction over the changdoloi in the organization of the village youngmen. But it is obligatory on the part of the latter to keep the headman informed when he utilizes the services of the boys in his own economic enterprises.

The working group of girls has no formal organization like that of the youngmen. The changdoloi is not its leader ; he only organizes them with the help of the *pator* in a team when their assistance is sought for such work as plastering of walls of new houses, transplanting, harvesting of paddy, etc. Such a team is only constituted for a specific piece of work. As soon as the

task is done the obligation of the girls as a team also ends. When a team is formed, care is taken to divide the work equally between all the young women. The changdoloi must not enlist any girl too frequently. He should also enlist from those households only where the girls are free of any domestic task. His efficiency as a leader depends on how judiciously he selects his working teams, either of the youngmen or the young women. He also has to ensure that the team works effectively, and carries out task in one day. At the same time, he cannot use force or threat nor can he penalize any failing in duty. The help rendered by the hadarikhel is voluntary. This is a system of informal cooperation. He does not go to the place of work of the hadarikhel, as it is not proper for him to do so. A senior man of the house for which the girls work leads them and stays with them.

When called upon to work in a hadarikhel a girl, on her part, should not try to avoid it, for that would be an unsocial act of shirking work. She may not be reprimanded, but it surely lowers her in the eyes of the community. Her parents also cannot afford to let her avoid work in a hadarikhel, as that may deprive them of hlep in their work.

Besides transplanting of seedlings from the seedbed to the ploughed field, another heavy agricultural work done by hadarikhel is the reaping of the ripe paddy. This is a task in which men may also join but usually it is a woman's work ; men assist only when the work has to be done quickly. Such an occasion arises when it threatens to rain.

The work is comparatively hard than transplantion. It takes a full day of hard labour. As they go to it, each carries uncooked rice as much as she needs and contributes it to a common pool of what they all bring and get it cooked by some one of them. The house for which they work need not supply them any food or implements.

Harvesting is a crucial operation in paddy cultivation. Not only the reaping has to be completed the day it starts but the grains also have to be threshed with feet and stored in the granary on that very day ; for they may get damaged if left exposed in the season of uncertain weather. The men carry the paddy from the field to the house, as soon as it is reaped.

The girls and the men who may be helping in cutting and carrying paddy are always alive to the importance to the

work. On the appointed day, they go early in the morning to the place of their work in separate groups. The girls bring their own sickles. They start from one end of the field. The stalk, are cut uniformly at about nine centimeters from the ground. Every girl knows how many stalks go to a that bundle that a man can carry. As soon as that much, which weighs about twenty kilograms, has been cut it is tied with wisps of hay in a bundle and set standing on the ground. When a number of bundles have been cut the boys of the dekakhel carry them to the house of the owner. They do it as a task allotted to them by their leader, the changdoloi. Two bundles are carried at a time, each tied at the two ends of a bamboo pole placed across the shoulder.

At the end of the day, the workers return to their own houses. They are fed in the house for which they have worked. But usually this feast is given later, for the more important work of treading is to be done at that time.

For separating the grains from the stalks, paddy is spread out in the open courtyard of the domicile. Bullocks or cows are tied in a pairs with loose loops at the ends of a rope. They are made to tread upon the paddy stalks until the grains are separated from them. The empty ears and stalks are then collected and heaped up on one side of the domicile. The grains are gathered in clean places in the courtyard and tiny pieces of broken stalks that still remain are fanned off.

Only the cleaned paddy is stored in the granary which is a gabled house built on stilts. Its walls and floor are thickly plastered in the inside against moisture. This is very important, for the quality of the grain deteriorates in storage if there is ever so little moisture on the husk. Great care is taken to keep the paddy free from all moisture from the time it is brought from the field to his house. Separating the paddy from the ears is a busy and tiring work. There is no rest from work until all the paddy cut in a day is treaded and stored. One starts work as soon as the bundles of paddy are brought in the courtyard from the field, in the afternoon. Sometimes one has to work late into the night.

There are two ways of storing paddy in the granary. Commonly, the grains are heaped on the floor away from the entrance, leaving space needed for collecting and taking them out. Only that much that a household cosnumes in a year, that is, until the next harvest, is heaped on the floor. But the grains

which are to be used as seeds in the next sowing are kept in a circular tray thickly covered with a layer of hay. Surplus grains which may not be consumed in the year are also kept in the same manner. These trays are either ranged along the wall of the granary or in the dwelling house whichever is convienent. After the paddy has been stored, it is for the women to take care of it. Husking is done from time to time, once in a week on the average, for consumption. Men do not bother about how the paddy is husked or used in the family.

Husking is done in two different ways. In the first process, paddy is pounded with a pestle fixed at one end of a long and heavy wooden beam, which is operated as a lever with the foot. In the other method, it is pounded in a mortar with pestle operated by hands. This is for separating the finer chaffs from the grains which have been already husked. But when a small quantity of paddy is to be husked or rice is required to be powdered for making cakes, the mortar and the pestle are usually used.

Baskets are used for cleaning, storing and carrying grains of paddy or rice. Mats made of bamboo are used for drying paddy in the sun. Paddy is carried from the granary to the house for husking in big and small baskets according to the quantity.

Baskets are rarely used by the men, as household chores such as cleaning, drying and husking of paddy are done by the women. But it is the man who makes all the baskets. He works in the afternoon, after the paddy season is over, with bamboo from his own grove. Basketry articles are not sold in market, but if a villager needs any, having himself not the time to make one, he can get one made by a neighbour on payment in cash.

Fishing gears are also made by the men with bamboo. Every man should know the art of basketry. Formerly, it was tought by the old men to the youngmen of the village in the dormitory. But in Nambor the youngmen do not stay in the dormitory hall, and so they do not get any training in it there. But the system still continues in the village of Amswoi where the boys learn it in the dormitory from the old men. In Nambor, when a man wants to learn it he goes to an old neighbour of his who knows the art. Otherwise, he pays for the basketry he needs. If he supplies his own bamboo he pays for the labour only. Except for the iron implement, the Lalungs of Nambor in

the entire agricultural operations do not depend for anything on sources outside the village.

The village acts as a self-contained productive unit and organizes labour on mutual interdependence of its own men and women. A man or a householder gets whatever help he needs in sowing and harvesting the crop from within the village. The initiative, however, ultimately lies in his own hand. He gets himself busy as soon as the early summer rains start. He prepares the seedbed, grows the seedlings in it and goes to the field to plough his land to make it ready for transplantion. For about nine months from that time, he works outdoors in the paddy field as well as on the homestead land, growing paddy, jute, vegetables and sugarcane. Early in the morning before the sun rises he is in the field with his plough and bullocks or cows. After about three hours of work, he allows himself a little break for a repast which is brought to him by his children or wife. It consists of boiled rice that has been soaked in water overnight, salt, green chilli, onion and a potful of rice beer. First of all, he helps himself with the rice beer, but he does not drink all of it; a little is left to be taken after the meal. He resumes work after a smoke and works for about another three hours and returns home before the sun gets too hot.

It is now time to eat and take rest. The midday meal over he takes a short nap before the next round of work in the late afternoon. It is dark as he comes back at the end of the day's labour. After a wash, he calls on friends and sits with those who have called on him. They gossip over rice beer, and disperse early to their night meals. Nobody keeps late hours. The meal is taken soon after sunset and the whole village goes to sleep by the early hours of the night.

The importance of rice in the economy of the people of Nambor lies in this that it is the only staple food that sustains them the year round. It is also fermented into a drink called *chu*. Square meals in which rice is the main item are taken three times a day. The first one consists of rice soaked in water in the night, salt, chilli and onion. Generally, it is served early in the morning and taken by all, the young and the old alike. When one goes to the field early at day-break his food is taken to him there.

The next meal is taken any time between midday and early afternoon. It is a course of rice which is boiled without straining of the gruel broth and fish or vegetables. There are two kinds of

common broth, one called *posola* and the other *wankhari*. The same items go to make the evening meal which is taken at sunset.

Posola is a preparation of fish cooked with slices of tender banana stem, while the wankhari is a thin broth of pulvarised rice and kind of sweet-sour fruit [*dillenia indica*] which is available in summer months. At other times pieces of vegetable and coriander are added to it. Besides, seasonal vegetables like beans, radish, and lady's fingers are taken fried or in curry. Sweets and milk are rarely taken, though cattle are reared in the village. Oil as a cooking medium is not generally used. Mustard is grown on a limited scale. When oil is needed it is extracted from pounded and lightly fried seeds with a heavy wooden lever fixed at the trunk of a tree.

A kind of indigeneous alkali is obtained by burning dry pieces of banana stem and is taken occasionally with food. It is prepared generally once in a year and kept in a bamboo container. In dry months, the banana stems are sliced and dried in the sun. These are then burnt on a slow fire in a clean place in the open courtyard. As the fire burns water is rightly sprinkled on it. This is done so that all the alkali in the ash is not destroyed. The alkali is filtered out with strainer made of bamboo or cane. This kind of alkaloid ash is called *khar*. It is of black colour but turns into dark reddish brown when mixed with water. In summer, it is frequently taken with food or in the morning as laxative. Sometimes, it is also used as condiments for vegetables, especially in preparations of gourd and cucumber. It is also taken with thin rice gruel as a medicine for mild attacks of dysentery.

Cooking and serving of food are the duty of an elderly woman, specially the housewife. She serves the food to her husband and the older boys separately. The children and the older girls eat with their mother. When there is a guest in the house the lady of the house serves him food in the same manner as to her husband. If she is busy with other domestic work, a senior girl takes her place, but never a man. It is a breach of etiquette if a guest is not served food by a woman. If the housewife is unable to attend on any formal for informal occasion, the householder gets a woman from another house to honour the social rule.

Drink is as important as food in the Lalung society. It is made by fermenting broken rice grains which they get as by-product. Some grains get broken in husking into minute bits

that do not go well with the whole grains in cooking the amount of broken rice produced in the process of husking depends on the skill of the woman doing it and on the quality of the paddy harvested. It is about one third of the quantity husked.

Not every kind of rice is good for beer. The right kind is selected for fermentation. The summer rice, *ahu,* is not generally used. On festive occasions, older persons take rice beer prepared from a special variety of summer rice called *bora.* It is stronger than that brewed from the winter or sali rice.

It is the women who brew beer. Though an every day drink, brewed beer is not stored for long hours. It is brewed fresh every time needed in the day. Rice is fermented and kept in such a way that, whenever required it is mixed with water and pressed into a drink. A kind of yeast is used for fermentation. It is made once in a year in form of tiny cakes, and stocked in every house. The yeast is a concoction of certain kind of leaves found in the locality. There are six popular varieties. These are the *dhekia* [*petrio polypadinum*], *vekuri* [*solanum indicum*] a shurb that tastes bitter, and leaves of moringa, sugarcane and eggplant.

Any five of these are dried in the sun, pounded in the mortar and made into cakes with the gruel of rice. These are dried and keep for a long time. The suitable time for making yeast is late winter, when the green ingredients are easy to gather and to dry in the hot sun. The yeast cakes are called *bakhar.* The quantity used depends largely on one's experience. There is however a standard proportions of mixture for guidance. Immediately after boiling, rice is spread on a clean mat of bamboo, after yeast has been mixed with it. Then it is covered with banana leaves and is kept in shade, usually inside the house . When the rice is completely dry it is collected in pots. Normally, a man consumes about seven to eight litres of rice beer a day. When work is heavy as when he tills land or harvests or builds a house, he takes more. But it does not exceed ten litres a day. But a potful may be emptied at one sitting on a ceremonial gathering of friends. This required as much fermented rice as fills one fourth of a pot with the capacity of about three litres of rice beer. A pot of fermented rice may be kept for not more than two days in summer, and a day more according to the humidity in the atmosphere in winter.

At least, one narrow-necked jar or two of fermented rice is kept ready for extraction. From such a pot, the brew is drained out after water has been mixed with it, first in the morning, next at noon and lastly in the evening.

Beer is extracted only by the man. The technique is learnt through practice and experience. A long bunch of straw is screwed into the mouth of the pot till it is tightly set. Clean water is slowly poured on it till it starts seeping through the stopper and glides down the inner walls setting on the rice without disturbing it. Tappings on the outer surface indicate the level reached by the water. The brew is not drawn immediately. The pot is turned by hand both clockwise and anti-clockwise several times to mix the fermented rice with water well. Only a cannoisseur knows how to get the right proportions and strength from the brew. The jar is tilted slowly over a vessel in such a manner as the liquid only comes out. The fermented rice remain inside blocked by the stopper.

In practice and by convention, rice-beer is not taken as an intoxicant, except on festive occasions. The rule of conduct demands that a man should not drink himself tipsy but should behave himself in the presence of his senior. Normally, rice-beer is taken with food in the morning, noon and evening. Besides, it is a custom to offer it to the guests and friends on visit. In the evening, a man usually takes rice-beer with his friends either in his house or in the house of a friend. Women and minors never drink. The youngmen may take it but not in the presence of their elders. But a married man may, when it is served with food.

Since only broken rice is used in brewing beer, it does not affect the householder's requirement of rice as the staple food. A grown-up person normally consumes about three hundred and thirtythree kilograms of rice in a year. Proportionately in the same period, he consumes one third the quantity of broken rice which he gets as by-product of the husked paddy. Since women and boys do not take rice beer, there is no dearth of broken rice in any house even in the lean season between April and June.

In Nambor, the Lalungs grow all the rice they require for their consumption. So they have not to purchase rice either in the market or from other villagers. The average yield of paddy varies between eight hundred eighty and eleven hundred kilograms an acre. Of the two types of seasonal paddy, only the winter variety may be sold for cash if there is any to spare.

But the summer variety that is the ahu rice is not sold even if there is any surplus, because, the people of Nambor say, there is no local market for it. They grow it mainly as a stand-by stock, should the winter paddy fail owing to the vagaries of the monsoon. Besides, ahu rice is believed to give a man more energy for work and toil in the field. On ahu rice a man can work harder and longer hours without feeling hungry.

Many varieties of summer and winter paddy are grown in a season. They say in Nambor that one should not count the number of varieties of paddy ; for paddy is wealth and one may lose it by counting. Each villager decides what variety of paddy to grow according to his need. Usually, one does not grow more than twenty varieties in a year and that is mostly of the winter paddy.

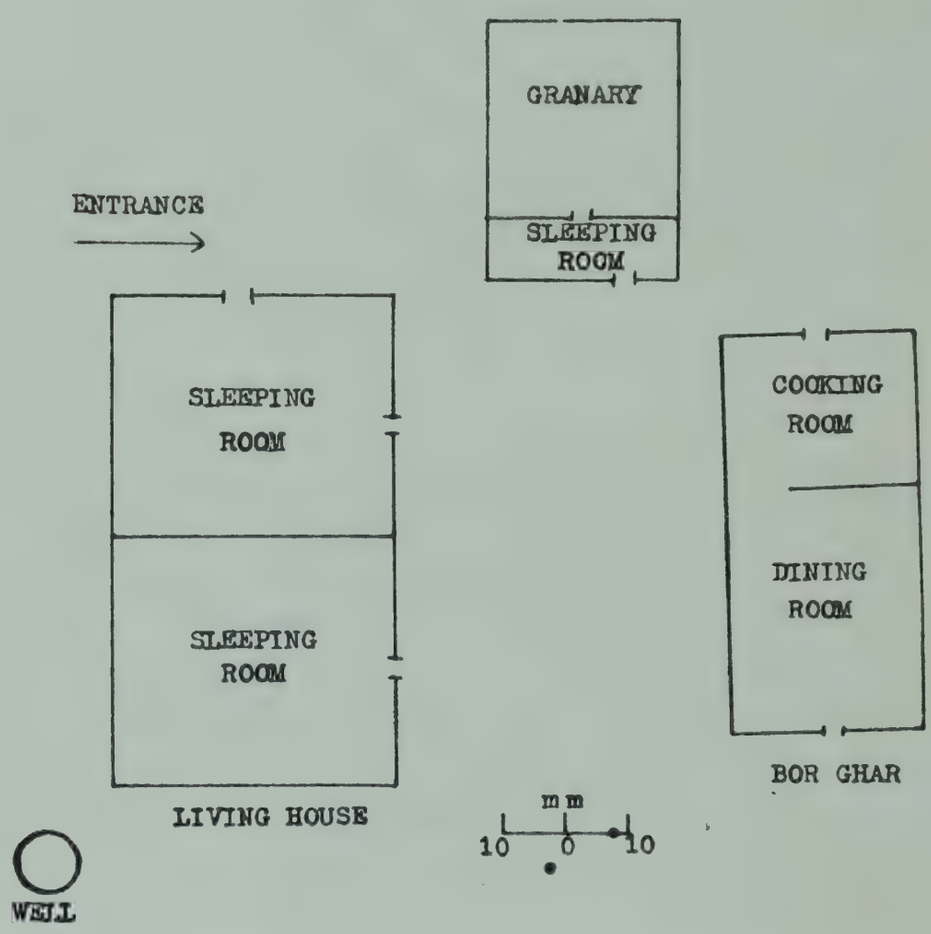
The agricultural season nowadays begins in summer with the cultivation of ahu. None should till his land before the festival called *chongkhong* early in the month Jaistha [May—June] ; but by the time of chongkhong festival is performed, the season for transplantation of ahu seedlings is over. So it has become almost usual for everyone cultivating the summer paddy to break this rule, and to plough the land in late March or early April and pay penalty of a fowl for breaking the rule. This fine is not collected immediately by the headman, but at the time of the festival. Nobody knows when the ahu cultivation was introduced in the village of Nambor. But it must have been gradually adopted as population went up requiring larger and larger supply of the staple food.

Though the Lalungs of Nambor do not practice double cropping, their economy is self-sufficient in the staple food. Yet this has not made them absolutely independent of cash money. There are other needs for which they need money : They have to buy kerosine oil, cotton yarn, match-boxes, cloth, salt, pottery and iron implements.

In the economy of Nambor, the productive activities for earning cash is mainly confined to the homestead area. Every homestead is as it were a tiny farm where horticultural crops, like areca nut, betel, banana and a number of seasonal vegetables are raised. In this the householder has to depend on his own labour as customarily the youngmen and the girls of the village are not called in to help. He tends his domestic farm all by himself. He devides his time and labour between his paddy fields and the homestead as best as he can manage.

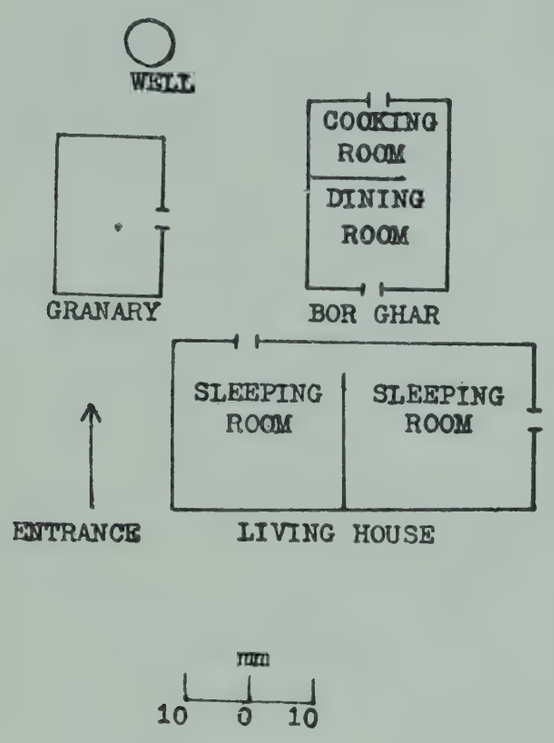
The domicile is built in the homestead land, by the village path. There may be one to two living huts in it according to the size of the household. A large area around the domicile is enclosed within a strong fence of bamboo poles, to keep off stray cattle and pigs.

GROUND PLAN OF A DOMICILE



There is no rigid pattern of location of huts within the domicile. The living hut is built on an open courtyard. A well-to-do householder may build additional huts at one end of the courtyard screening it from view from the village path ; but usually the courtyard opens directly on the village path. There is no size for the courtyard other than a criterion that every household should have space enough for treading of ripe paddy by bullocks or cows. The size of the courtyard is, thus indirectly, determined by the amount of paddy one grows and gets treaded. As ones enters the domicile one gets an idea of the affluence of the household from the size of its courtyard and disposition of the huts in it. There are two huts, close to each other for living, cooking and dining. The common practice is to a separate hut for cooking and dining. It is divided into two apartments, one mainly for dining and the other exclusively for cooking.

Such hut is known as a borghar. On one side of the courtyard stands the granary that can be seen from the living hut. The cattleshed is also usually built not far away from the courtyard, on the side which opens on the village path. The granary and the cattle are symbols of wealth which the householder likes to have near him and in constant view.



The areca palm is a never-failing source of wealth. A large area in the backyard is reserved for the main grove and great care is taken of it. Other available spaces is also used to grow the palm, but not in the courtyard.

Areca nut is a seasonal crop that ripes in winter. Normally, the palm begins to yield about seven years after the planting and bears fruit for about twenty years. The householder is sure of the crop at a particular time of the year. One grows as much areca as one requires for one's own consumption as well as for selling for cash.

Raw but mature nuts are chewed with betel and lime. The nut is very hard when dry. To retain its as soft as when green, it is kept soaked in water after plucking with the husk on. It is a social etiquette and gesture of friendliness to offer areca and betel to visitor. Young boys and girls, however, are not expected to indulge in the habit of chewing them. It is in constant demand and there is always a ready market for it and fetches ready cash. The practice of chewing areca nut and betel is widely prevalant all over India ; but in eastern India it has a stronger, deeper and wider hold. A housedholder of Nambor gets eight rupees for a

kilogram of dry areca nut in the local market or from a trader. The price varies with demand and supply, but one always gets almost all the cash one needs by the sale of nuts. It is a form of money that renders the householder a potential buyer and so links him with the rural commerce operating in the country markets.

Bamboo is another useful economic commodity. No householder builds his domicile without growing a bamboo grove in the backyard. It is a all-purpose material equally useful in house-building, basketry, fencing the homestead, etc. Once a grove has been raised, its thrives by itself.

Usually, one gtes all the bamboo one needs from one's own grove. When a house is to be built, however, all the bamboo needed may not be available in one's own grove. On such an occasion, it is out in the jungle and taken to the village by the youngmen. Nambor has a jungle not very far away where they collect wood and bamboo for building dwelling houses. The homestead groves supply bamboo for repairs or for building small sheds for the cattle and the pigs, granary, and fences around the huts and the garden. All these are done by the householder himself with or without aid from his grown-up sons.

The bamboo groves are this a ready and hand store of a very useful material and save long walks to the jungle and the labour of hauling for every small work and repair.

Banana is another useful crop grown invariably in every homestead land. The leaf, fruit and stem of the plant are all of use. On ceremonial and formal occasions, cooked food is served on banana leaves. Besides, it is also used for packing food on long journeys and for lunch in the field. Whatever the occasion, leaves are to be got from one's grove. The fruit is taken but occasionally, more often it is sold. The pith of the stem is sliced and cooked with meat ; it also used to prepare the alkalic condiment for cooking.

Besides these perenneal crops, seasonal vegetables such as gourd, arum, legume, egg-plant, cucumber, chilli, sweet-potato and fruits like papaya, jack and mango are grown in the domicile for domestic consumption. All the vegetables taken are grown in kitchen garden. Normally, nobody sells them.

In recent years, certain well-to-do persons who have spare lands have started growing jute and sugarcane though on a limited scale, near or within their homestead areas. Jute is

essentially a cash crop, sold to the traders who come to the village for it. But sugarcane is not sold raw. Its juice is extracted, converted into jaggery and sold in the market or to the visiting traders.

Many grow cocoanut also as cash crop. Of the oil seeds only mustard is grown in Nambor. The oil is sometimes used in cooking. There is only one oil press in the village at the house of the headman ; all use it to extract oil. If one does not have any mustard of his own but wants some for cooking, one borrows from others, to be returned in the next season. These recent introductions have raised the purchasing power of the villagers. Since the basic need of food and shelter is satisfied through a corporate system of labour and production, the money earned by the sale of the newly introduced crops is spent on consumer's goods which do not form an productive part of the economic complex of the Lalung society.

Today, no tribal economy in northeastern India is wholly and fully self-contained. But in the basic needs of food, shelter and partly of clothing many a tribe still are largely self-sufficient. The Lalungs are one of such communities.

The shift towards money economy has began with the trade in indigenous horticultural produces like areca-nut, surplus paddy and fruit. The urge for earning cash is on the increase. Those householders who have land to spare go in for cash crops like jute, sugarcane and tobacco too in some cases.

In the sphere of cash economy, productive activities are exclusively organised by each householder on his own. He cannot ask for the help of the dekakhel in the cultivation and processing of the jute for fibre. For such work, he either depends on his own family or on labour hired from outside. Since the basic economy is not based on production of cash crops the householder cannot expect help to grow them from his fellow villagers in the traditional way of mutual reciprocity.

Cooperation of the community as represented by the dekakhel is always available in the construction of new house. They help the owner in fetching materials such as wood, bamboo and cane from the jungle. Building or repairing of house is a seasonal activity, that comes off in late winter after the paddy has been harvested. It is then that the villagers, free

of agricultural work, get themselves busy in building new houses or renovating the old ones. But this coincidence of free time and building season does not by itself explain the corporative activity. It is also the season when the materials are ready for collection. This availablity and the free days have coincided in fixing the season for building of houses as men and materials are easy to get then. Wood and saplings can be cut any time but these are collected only when winter has set in and are carried to the building site along with other materials.

In building of houses, the people of Nambor have a parochial and conservative preference for local and indigenous materials. Once in a formal gathering of the elders of the village an affluent villager who had used galvanised iron sheets, sawn timber and cement, expressed his desire to stand the election for the next tenure of changdoloi. He was promptly told that one who had used foreign materials for his house could not be elected to such an important post.

The site for a living house or granary is selected by the owner. There was a time when it was done by divination by the magician or ojha of the village or by the owner himself. In one type of divination, the divinator laid a spear along his chest and arms spread out sidewise. If the spear slipped down on the ground at the time of uttering incantations during which the body moved, it was taken as unfavourable. In another method, the owner of the land put a handful of rice, tightly packed in a banana leaf, into a hole in the ground where he intended to build the house. This was done in the evening of an Wednesday. The packet was left buried for the night. In the morning, if the packet was found intact, the omen was favourable. These are not now practised, except when a new granary is to be built.

After the materials have been collected, a house does not take long to build. The framework is errected with bamboo poles on a plinth of earth as high as forty centimeters. The owner of the house is helped by the changdoloi, with the young unmarried men under him who build the walls and thatch the roof in one day. The boys are fed by the owner after the day's work, though it is not a formal obligation. The walls are plastered by the girls of the hadarikhel with clay and cow-dung.

A newly built house is occupied only after a conventional socio-religious rite. The owner of the house invites the borjela of his clan and the ojha of the village. The borjela enters the house and stands in its centre by the wall that separates the

cooking and the dining rooms. The ojha stays out, in the courtyard facing the house. After a while, the borjela loudly asks the ojha if everything is in order and if the house is free from evils eyes. Usually, the response is in the affirmative—everything is in order and the house is free of influences of evil spirits. On this announcement, the ojha lights a fire with a bunch of hay and carries it into the house the way the borjela has entered and places it in the hearth.

There is symbolism in this ritual. The participatory role of the borjela signifies his social responsibilities of looking after the welfare of the house of his sister's son.

The economy of food production may be divided into two productive processes. Staple food, rice, is produced with the co-operation of a number of men and women, acting at the behest of the householder. A certain kind of social modality is involved in this. But fruit, vegetables, areca, coco-nut and bamboo are grown with one's own individual efforts. One may, however, get help from his friends, at an informal person-to-person level but not in the formal social way. This kind of productive activites which a man carries out in homestead land can be described as the economy of the domicile. It is his own world of economy in which he is helped by his own family. Along with the husband, the lady of the house tends the kitchen garden whenever she can make time. The growing plants of chilli, ginger, turmaric, corriander and vines of gourd are mainly her personal care.

Besides, as a part of housekeeping she looks after the poultry. Eggs are taken occasionally, for fowls are reared mainly for broods. Usually, they are for sale or for sacrifice in ritual. The housewife does not sell them herself. She puts her price and hands them over to a man, may be her brother or any other trusted person of the family, who takes them to the market and brings her the sale money. The pigs are also tended by the women. These animals are generally eaten on ceremonial occasions and they are sold only within the village. The money is taken by the woman who has reared them. The money which a woman gets in this way is spent by her as she likes. The husband has no say in this.

Fishing is an important activity in the food economy. Often, almost five days in a week, women, one or two from every house, go for fishing. About five or six girls, married as well as unmarried, form into a group and go to a stream or marsh not far away from the village. They come back by noon,

after fishing for about two to three hours. They catch fish with a special type of basket trap known as *jakoi*. It is conical in shape with a big, triangular opening. One of its ends is extended to serve as the handle for manipulation. One goes down into water with it and pushes it down and forward by the handle.

The whole group goes into water together, dipping the traps at the likely places. After the traps have been pushed about in the water over a certain space, they are taken out to collect the catch. This kind of device is used usually to catch small fish in shallow water or small streams where current is not strong. Experience teaches the women to spot the best fishing grounds near and the best season to fish. They go fishing in those places in groups. But occasionally they take long journeys to distant ponds when they are able to haul a big catch. They set out early in the morning and return home in the afternoon.

Men go fishing when there is no heavy agricultural work. They use two kinds of basketry traps. One of these is called *chepa* and shaped like a barrel having a closed end. It is used in the rains in shallow running water. The other trap, named *polo,* is shaped like a dome with an open circular opening at the top. It is used in shallow stagnant water. It is plunged where fish is detected or expected. The catch trapped in base is taken out by hand through the opening at top. With the men, fishing is more of a pastime than an economic pursuit. But there are three festive occasions in the year when they go in groups to fish in some stream. They use no trap but poison the water. On the counsel of the village elders and the headman, a day is fixed, and it is announced in the village through the barika, the village messenger. This is done, because it is a convention that there should be at least one man from every house in the group. The catch is brought to the village hall for distribution, equally between all the houses: only the headman gets one extra share, even if he has not been in the party.

Fish is a popular delicacy. Fishing is a pursuit of the women, one of her domestic duties as it were. The fishing gears used by the women are not suitable for deep waters or in strong currents. They are, therefore, not used to fishing in deep waters or big rivers.

The old people say that there was a time when they used to go in groups to the jungle for games like deer, boar, tiger, with spears and bows, and easily and invariably bagged three

or four deer which provided the entire village with ample meat. But in these days one cannot be sure of game. As population increased and communication developed games in the forest grew scarce rapidly. Bows and spears have gone out of fashion. These now linger for symbolical use on festive or ceremonial occasion only. Having described the socio-economic picture and implication of the Lalung economy of Nambor, its similarities and differences with hill village of Amswoi can now be considered.

We now turn to the hill village of Amswoi to bring out its difference from the plains village in its economy.

Amswoi differs in some respects technologically and ecologically from Nambor. Living in the hills, their contacts with plains to the north are more commercial than cultural. They come down to plains markets to sell their agricultural produce, and with the money they get they purchase essential commodities like salt, cotton yarn, pottery and iron implements. This economic link is very old.

Amswoi stands near a historical route through which military expeditions from the plains and the hills used to pass frequently between the 15th and the 17th centuries. But largely, owing to geographical isolation, they have lived as a separate village community in their own socio-economic world.

As in Nambor the main economic stay of the people of Amswoi is agriculture, growing of wet paddy to be specific. But the technique and organization of the productive activities are different. Collectively, wet rice cultivation is called *fadar*. Eight varieties of wet paddy, namely, *mikhir, thinghri, chingni, sathuri, chonga, para, sagom,* and *cholukuthi* are commonly grown. The bulk of the rice produced is used as the staple food, but a part of it is brewed into beer, and for this the *mikhir* variety is considered the best. The cultivation of wet rice as a process falls into well-defined phases as in Nambor; only cattle and ploughs are not used.

The main difference in sowing is that no seedlings are transplanted before the fields have been hoed, levelled and irrigated. This is laborious, and takes long to do. Hoeing begins by the end of March and continues for about a month, as the process is repeated until the soil has been thoroughly loosened and levelled with a harrow, drawn either by a man or buffalo. There is no clear cut division between the sexes, in the labour from the growing of the seedling, to the transplantation. The

more strenuous work like hoeing is usually done by the men. Though the normal practice is to transplant seedlings from the seedbed, sometimes seeds are broadcast directly in irrigated fields.

There is a variation in time in the two methods of sowing. Direct broadcasting is done at the onset of the summer monsoon in the month of June. But transplantation may continue up to the month of September. The fields are not allowed to dry after transplantation till the plants have taken root and start growing. For this water is brought from streams by means of cannals dug along natural declivities.

Wet paddy, therefore, is grown in such areas as can be easily irrigated with water from streams with perennial flow. The crop is harvested in December. The ears are cut along with the stalk, a little above the root. They are taken home after the grains have been separated from the stalks in the field. This is done by beating them with sticks. A small plot in the paddy field is cleared where the paddy reaped is heaped. Here boys and girls in separate groups of seven, turn by turn, separate the grains from the stalks by beating them with sticks. The process continues till all the paddy reaped from a field has been threshed. The grains are then gathered in a heap and fanned with a winnow to blow away broken bits of stalks. After this they are collected in baskets of twisted straw, each containing about thirty kilograms. These baskets are carried home and placed along the walls of the sleeping and eating rooms.

Simultaneously with the growing of wet paddy the villagers carry on shifting cultivation on the hill slopes, to supplement their food and to add to their purchasing power.

Production of crops in shifting cultivation is entirely dependent on the monsoon. This is also partially true of the wet cultivation. Growing of wet rice involves human efforts to counteract the vagaries of nature in an attempt to minimise the dependance on nature. It places the growing of paddy on a surer ground, by irrigation, whereas cultivation on the hill slopes lies completely at the mercy of the monsoon.

In shifting cultivation a plot of land is not used every year. It is left fallow for three successive years after one harvest has been reaped. Four separate plots are successively used in a cycle of four years one after another. These plots are situated around the village, not beyond eight kilometers, where they can be cultivated simultaneously with the wet rice fields in the valley-

land lower down. The agricultural operations are so arranged that both the wet rice and shifiing cultivation can be attended to in the working season.

Before a plot is brought under shifting cultivation, it is cleared by cutting down the trees and shurbs that have grown over it in the three years of fallow. This is done in early October, just after the summer monsoon is over. The branches of big trees are lopped, leaving the stumps standing. The debris are burnt in the clearing, which is fertilized by the ash. The land is left idle for the two successive months. It is throughly hoed in early March, and the soil is mixed with the ash of the fire so that it is not washed away by the early April rain. This rain is of vital importance in the shifting cultivation. If it fails or if it rains too heavily the entire crop may be destroyed.

Six varieties of paddy are grown in by shifting cultivation : changung, *khasi,* para *ashu, changong, birung* and *naga.* As the names suggest some of them were borrowed from neighbouring areas. The ashu is obviously a plains variety, where it is known by the same name. It is Sanskritic in origin, and denotes a paddy that ripens quickly. The khasi and naga perhaps refer to the tribes from whom they are adopted. The birung is a kind of rice that can be cooked inside the hollow section of a certain type of soft green bamboo, a way in which rice is cooked, on certain occasions, by the tribal and plains people in north east India.

All kinds of paddy are not sown together. Three or four varieties may be sown in one plot, separately. Usually, eight to ten grains of paddy are put in a hole dibbled a with pointed sticks or saplings. Both men and women work together. They dig the holes starting from one end of the plot, followed by women who drop in the seeds and cover them with earth.

In the shifting cultivation a number of other crops are also grown simultaneously. Like paddy, millet and cotton have separate plots. Millet, however is not cultivated by all. Maize is sown in small holes, two to three seeds in each. In the same manner, chilli, gourd, cucumber, egg-plant, sesame, job's tears, castor, arum, sweet potato and yam are sown separately, but in the same plot with paddy and maize. Cucumber seeds are occasionally broadcast. Sowing is not done on wet days. It requires about a month to sow all the crops one after another. Usually, yam and arum are sown last. All crops that are to be grown together must to sown before paddy

and maize sprout. But millet and cotton are sown broadcast in the month of May or June according to advent of the monsoon.

The early summer rain brings life to all the seeds, which start sprouting. If rain fails or is late, the sprouting is also delayed. Shifting cultivation in north east India is dependent on the summer rain. The fields on the hilly slopes are sown with the April showers. If it fails paddy and mize would not grow. The other crops of vegetables may survive a partial drought, and grow late in the summer monsoon. The crops are harvested at different times according to their growth. Maize and millet ripe faster than rice. They mature within four months of sowing. Next comes paddy. It is harvested between August and September, or a little earlier.

Vegetables take more time to grow. They are gathered in late monsoon. But arum and sweet potato mature after monsoon. Job's tears and cotton take even longer. Their turn for harvesting does not come before November.

Mixed cultivation requires more sustained and greater attention and care than the wet rice cultivation in the valleys. It is weeded twice, in July and late September. A watch has to be kept over it day and night. Two huts are built for this, one on a high platform of bamboo and the other, a small shed, on the ground, used for guarding in the day. At night a small fire is lighted near it. The man who guards the plantation at night stays on the higher hut from where he can easily watch against elephants, wild pigs, deer or porcupine.

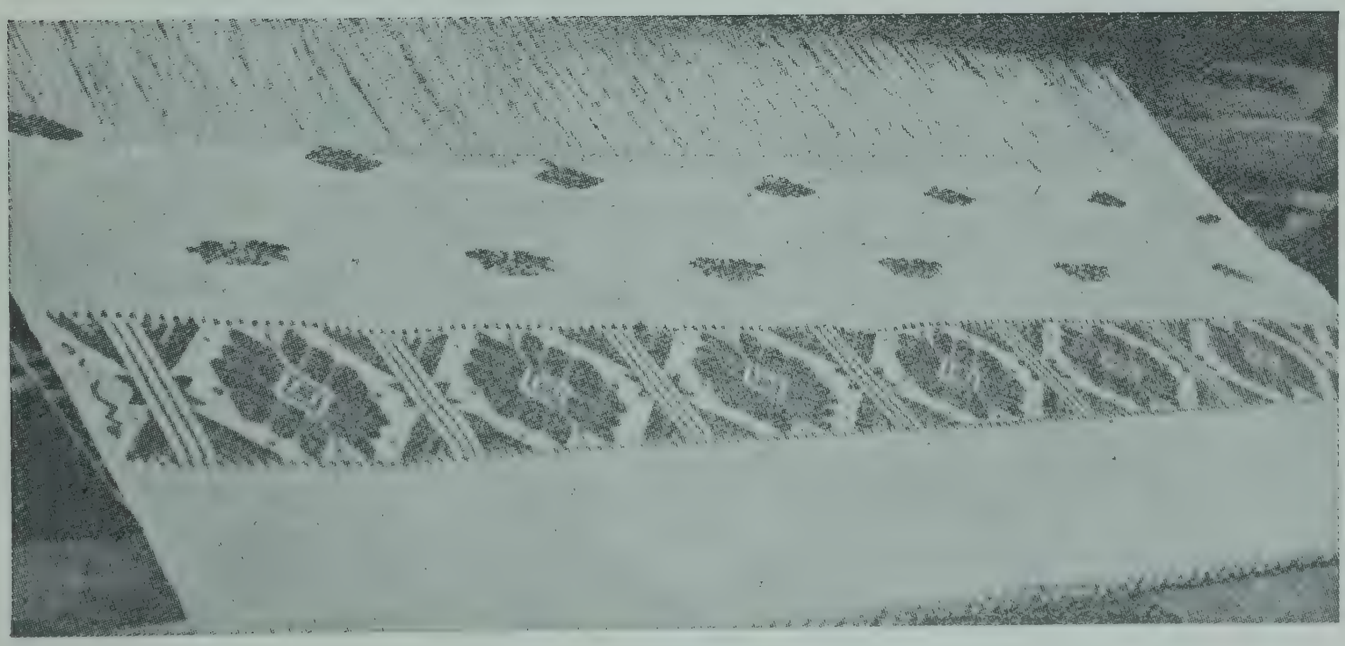
The wet and shifting cultivations practised by the people of Amswoi are technically and ecologically different. But in the overall economy they are complementary. The differences in the process of production have developed through the utilization and exploitation the land and natural resources in the hills in ways learnt by experience. Their demand for staple food is largely met from the wet cultivation. But it is not enough to sustain them for the whole year and to satisfy at the same time all kinds of economic needs as well.

The size of the land for wet cultivation per household at Amswoi is 2.75 acres and that of shifting cultivation 40 acres approximately. The average yield in every acre of wet and hilly lands in the northern part of the United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills ranges between eleven to thirteen

The common baskets for household use

The common fishing gears, (from L to R) Jakoi, Khaloi and Polo

The woman is working at her looms



The design for a stole used by the women

The women with their festive dress

quintals. Taking an average output of 41 quintals for each household of 4.80 in Amswoi, the index of individual intake comes to .85 quintal of paddy or .60 quintal of rice, which does not seem to indicate a low level of consumption for staple food. But this statistics would not fully reflect the economic picture ; for all the households do not have land for both wet and shifting cultivation. The surveyed position of this imbalance is indicated below :

Number of house holds	Only wet paddy land	Both wet paddy and shifting cultiva-tion	Only shifting cultiva-tion land	Landless
68	29	29	5	5

These differences bring out that about one half of the population of Amswoi depend on one form of agriculture either shifting or wet cultivation. Those having both types of land have a better economic stay as they are able to raise all kinds of cash crops by shifting cultivation. Production of the wet paddy land, however, does not adequately meet the demand for the staple food ; for a part of it is now-a-day sold, for cash. Often in lean months the rice stock gets exhausted and then the deficiency is made good by taking maize or millet. But those having no land for shifting cultivation to grow these supplementary staples, have to depend on edible tubers and roots that grow wild in the jungle.

Unless the natural vegetation dries up in droughts, a dire dearth of food does not occur in late winter or early summer. Three meals are taken normally. The first one, taken early in the morning, consists of dry fish and boiled vegetables cooked with chilli and salt. Of the two other meals in which there may not be any fish, one is taken at noon and the other in the evening ; vegetables as available are taken. Leafy vegetables are grown commonly either on the hill slopes or in the kitchen gardens at home. There are about thirty-four varieties of edible leaves which are collected from the jungle around the village.

In preparation of meals the alkaline concoction is used as in Nambor. This alkali is prepared from banana plants and a variety of wild bamboo called *waphang*. These are dried and burnt. The ash is collected in small conical baskets of bamboo. Water is poured over it to wash down the alkali contents from the ash. This is also used for cleaning cloth. About one hundred

years ago alkaline ash prepared from a variety of tender bamboo was taken as salt. But this has been replaced by salt sold in markets from the time of consolidation of the British administration in Assam.

The traditional dress of the men consists of three pieces of cloth one of which is called *jugla*. It is a loose sleeveless vest, sewn at the sides. The second is a short loin cloth, worn around the waist and with one of its ends passing between the thighs and finally stuck in at the back of the waist. This is called *Nara*. This is used on festive occasion. The third is the *phagu*— a piece of cloth wound round the head as a turban.

The women wear four separate pieces of unsewn cloth. They tie the *haskai* a decorated stole round the breast. Over it, they wear a small nara that covers the waist. Below this a broad skirt called *kachong* is worn. It covers the lower part of the body down to the knee.

Both men and women use a wrapper called *thina*. Some of these specially the *haskai* and *phaga* are made with rough silk thread, spun from *eri* yarn at home. The women and the girls spin *eri* yarn with small spindles. In recent years changes have taken place in the traditional dress. Formerly cotton yarn was spun by every family at home. But this practice has been abandoned, as spun thread can now to be got from the market. So are ready made garments such as shirt, skirt, coat, underwear, frock and blouse.

Weaving, spinning and rearing of cocoons form parts of the domestic work of a woman. She learns them as a girl from her mother. In Amswoi a girl who does not know how to weave and to rear silk cocoons, is rare to find. It is, however, not so among the plains Lalung. In the hill villages weaving of both *eri* and cotton is an essential part of the work to be done by the housewives. There is a ecological pattern in this cultural trait. The castor plant on which for the eri larva feed, is also the host of lac insects. For this castor plant is grown extensively by shifting cultivation along with vegetables and cereals. In the cis-mountain regions south of the Brahmaputra valley where the majority of the Lalungs and a part of the Bodo speaking communities are distributed, the production of lac and weaving of eri are bound up in a eco-cultural complex.

In house type and the layout of the village, the Lalungs have broad similarities with tribes such as the Kacharis and

the Mikirs. The basic similarity consists in the use of a single dwelling house for sleeping, cooking and storing of grains, either on the ground or on stilts.

In Amswoi, the domicile consists of a single dwelling hut on an open space enclosed on all sides by a well-built fence of bamboo. The house has a rectangular plinth of earth raised about one foot from the ground. The entrance door overlooks the village path. It is divided into four compartments for different uses.

The first room as one enters is called *khomphor*. It is the drawing room and is meant for visitors. The next known as *nomajhi* is the dining room for the men, and the store room for paddy. Besides, the husband and wife sleep here. From this room one enters *nukthi,* the compartment which is mainly meant for cooking. The hearth stands on the side nearer to the wall. It has a tripod about 30 cm. high with a ring on the top on which pots are placed over the fire in cooking. To the housewife, this room is important. Apart from cooking in it, she keeps all her domestic utensils by the wall near the hearth. When women come on visit she receives them in this room. Usually, the men do not enter it except for special reasons. Children and girls take food with their mother and sleep here. Paddy is also stored in this room along the walls in small baskets. The last room is smaller and is used for husking and storing the bulk of the paddy harvested.

The grounds around the dwelling house is utilized for a small garden (*charatuma*), where legume, maize, chilli, turmeric, gourd and fruits such as banana, pineapple and papaya are grown. The fruits are not usually sold, but are for consumption. Castor is also grown here. Its leaves are plucked to feed the larvae of eri. A small gable structure is sometimes built within the enclosure of the domicile to accommodate guests and visitors. A part of it, at the back, separated by a wall is used for husking paddy. For firewood and pigs, small sheds are built at convenient corners.

The living hut in a Lalung village, both in the plains the hills, is as a rule built within a fenced enclosure, with an entrance opening on the village path. In Amswoi, it is covered with bamboo bars suspended loosely from a horizontal bar fixed on two poles. One has to swing them aside to pass through them.

The productive activities of the people of Amswoi do not require complicated mechanical devices. Rice is cultivated both in terraced valley and hills, with only a simple socketed hoe, purchased now-a-days in the market. It appears that the socketed hoe was originally used, on a limited scale, by the Bodo speaking tribes in the plains. The Lalungs probably brought it to the hills where they developed cultivation on flat terraces utilizing the natural flow of water. Technically, the hoe used in this type of cultivation is different from that used by the Khasis which has a parabolic cutting edge, and a long tang flanked by concave shoulders on either side. Though the two tribes have close similarities in matrilineal kinship and social structure, their techniques of cultivation are different.

Draught animals, namely, bullocks and buffaloes are reared but not used for agricultural purposes. Buffaloes are occasionally used for drawing a mower for levelling rice fields. The cattle are reared mainly for sale in the plains markets. According to some Lalung informants, in old days these animals were sacrificed on ceremonial occasions. Pig, goat and fowl are the other domestic animals. They are not eaten except on religious occasions when they are sacrificed. It would appear that the socio religious value of these animals were greater than economic. Even now the Lalungs purchase pigeons and ducks to sacrifice them in rituals.

In the plains village of Nambor cattle are used only for agricultural work and not for milking. Culturally therefore domestication of cattle, pigs and fowls by the Lalungs was originally for religious purposes. The economic motive probably developed later and even then not to a very great extent.

Though Amswoi is geographically isolated from the plains, it is still dependent on its economically. Pottery and iron implements, namely, hoe, cutlass, sickle, knife and other implements are brought from the plains. There is a blacksmith in the village but his main occupation is agriculture. He only repairs worn out implements. Smeltling was not known to the Lalungs of the hills. It was, therefore, an economic necessity for them to get iron implements from the plains blacksmiths. These trading visits to the plains have gone on for ages. They came down to the plains with their own produces to sell.

Gradually changes have come in the original pattern of economic relations between plains and the hills, through the

introduction of cash economy and development of roads and communications between the hills and the plains and consolidation of administration during the last hundred years. The desire for earning more cash by selling indigenous produce has increased so much that it has sapped the enthusiasm for the stocking of food. This change has been possible because the Lalungs have started using manufactured consumers' goods.

There are three markets a week which the Lalungs of Amswoi visit. The largest one at Nelli, is situated about twenty-four kilometers north in the plains. The next is in the hills at Ampanai, about fourteen kilometers away. The third one is on the outskirts of their own village. About fifty years ago Nelli was the only mart. An evaluation of the impact of the 'external' economy on the indigenous production in the hills can be made by a comparison between the things sold and bought by the Lalungs. The inventory given here shows the diverse nature of this change.

INVENTORY OF COMMODITIES

Things bought	*Produce sold*
Salt, tobacco leaf, pasted tobacco, smoking cylinder fixed to a round bottom, tea, matchbox, *bidi*, soap, sugar, cotton yarn, areca-nut, betal, pottery, lantern, torchlight, aluminium and brass utensil, vitreous pottery, measuring balance and weight, mirror, comb, tobacco-box, pen, pencil, papers, biscuit, coconut oil, black-paper, sweets, jaggery, edible lime, pulse, empty bottle, cotton garment, foot-wear, sock, cap, ornament, hoe, cutlass, knife, sickle, iron tripod with circular ring at top, pigeon, fowl, duck and pig.	Rice, lac, cotton, *eri* cocoon, sesum, ginger, yam, green chilli, turmeric, maize, cinnamon, basketry, rain cover made with leaf, gourd, jackfruit, legume, papaya, sweet potato, banana, pineaple, mat made of bamboo, millet, job's tears, sugarcane, castor seed.

In the past, the surplus of the crops grown by shifting cultivation was exchanged for essential articles without which the barest techno-economical demands could not be satisfied. In the traditional pattern, the people of Amswoi used to come to the plains once a week on the average, to exchange lac, castor seed, sesame, and eri cocoon for pottery and iron implements. This practice continued undisturbed for ages until the cash economy was introduced in an organised manner.

The changes that have come about have not only diversified the relation between demand and supply, but has also shifted the centre of economic motivation from the old pattern of stratification. But now the higher purchasing power is utilized more for the non-productive consumers' goods than on the essential necessities. In this gradually emerging pattern the material well-being is taking the form of pecuniary solvency or purchasing capacity. It has reached a stage where the old system of production technology is proving inadequate and unsuitable.

As a result, certain imbalances have developed in the internal system of distribution and consumption of indigenous crops raised by wet and shifting cultivations. Many crops and produces now sold were formerly retained as a surplus stock. Rice, millet job's tears, maize, yam and sweet potato which were not grown for sale are now marketed for cash. But there is a limit to the increase of the purchasing power by the sale of food crops. In Amswoi, only twenty-nine households or families have plots for shifting cultivation, where they can grow cash crops. Others not having that advantage part with a portion of rice to meet their requirement for commodities like salt, cotton yarn, kerosine oil, lime areca nuts, betel leaves, pottery, utensils, iron implements and such other things. Since the indigenous system of production has not changed at the same rate as the utilization of crops, it has technologically reached a point of saturation.

In both the villages of Nambor and Amswoi, the main economic stay is the wet rice cultivation, though in methods of production they differ ecologically. The people of Amswoi have developed a system of irrigation to water their paddy fields thus gaining a certain degree of control over nature. In Nambor, the wet cultivation lies totally at the mercy of the monsoon.

But this difference is not related to the cash economy they have developed for satisfaction of demand for goods that are not produced by them. In Nambor, the cash crops are raised mainly in the homestead lands which are not utilized for the wet rice cultivation. The villagers do not part with any considerable quantity of their food crops to earn cash. The picture is different at Amswoi. Here homestead lands do not provide any scope for growing cash crops or bamboo groves.

The houses and the two villages differ greatly in the economic significance, the arrangement of mode of construction the domiciles. Consequently, the organization of household as production unit has also its socio-economic variations.

The average size of a household in Nambor is 4.80. This is a much higher figure than that of Amswoi where it is only 7.83. This difference may be attributed to a probable bioecological factor : the birth rate is higher in the plains than in the hills. But there are a number of socio-economic factors which play a decisive role in determining the relative size of households or family in the villages.

The normal size of the Lalung family in Amswoi is determined by the residence pattern of the spouses after marriage. A woman does not permanently live in the house of her mother after marriage but if she is the youngest or the only child of her parents, she continues to live in the house of her birth with her husband. For an older daughter, a separate house is built on a part of the land owned by her mother. She is also given a share of agricultural holding which she manages independently with her husband. This type of matrilineal and matrilocal family is the smallest socio-economic unit.

The pattern of residence in Nambor is changing as either of the spouses prefers to remain in the house of his or her birth. As a result, the family often consists of persons of two generations living together and working as a joint socio-economic unit.

The changing residence pattern in Nambor has extended the size of the original family making it a bigger socio-economic group than that in Amswoi. A complete reversal from the matrilineal to the patrilineal system would probably reduce the average size of the resultant family. But it may not be comparable to its original form, for an idea of living together for better economic benefits has tended to hold the married siblings in the form of a joint-family or household.

This is evident from domiciliary structure of lineal kins descended from common parents. Break-up of the sixty-nine households of Nambor is as under :

Living pattern of two generation kins

Type	Number
The same hearth and roof	59
Separate roofs but the same hearth	18
Separate roofs and hearths but the same domicile	1

The bigger size of a household makes it possible for its members to work as a compact unit with greater economic viability. Ecological environment is primarily responsible for the difference that obtains in the economic value of the homestead land and its cash crops between Nambor and Amswoi. But mere existence of natural facilities would not bring economic benefit unless the resources were exploited through sustained and organized labour.

In major agricultural operations, there is interdependence between the households of Nambor but the production of cash crops in the homestead area is exclusively confined to the kins eating and living together. But the pattern of organizational activities in the socio-economic sphere is better knit in Amswoi. Its all kinds of agricultural work, namely, hoeing, digging of irrigation channels, clearing of land for cultivation, building of houses, harvesting, transportation of grains from the fields to the house, and such other heavy work which could not be done expeditiously by a small family in which the number of working hands does not exceed three on the average. Every family depends on the dormitory organization for manual work on days specifically appointed for it. The labour is paid either in kind or cash. The dormitory is a repository of labour for the whole village. Its working strength is deployed through its leader acting in unision with the village headman and the council of elders.

A married woman in Amswoi wields a greater authority than her husband in the control of the wealth of the family. She shares with her husband the labour in the fields and keeps the proceeds from the sale of rice and cash crops.

There is still another significant variation which shows the importance of weaving in the Lalung culture. There is a general similarity among all the tribes and rural communities of Assam, but what is found in Amswoi is an ancient trait that has survived through the changing times. In Nambor in the old days weaving unsewn cloth from eri yarn was practised. It has been now abandoned. The women of Amswoi have not given up weaving with the eri silk.

The whole process of rearing the cocoon, spinning and weaving is a laborious and long drawn one. It takes a woman about six months to make a wrapper of eri silk from the spinning of the yarn, to the weaving of the cloth which she has to do along with her other domestic work. Weaving is done by the

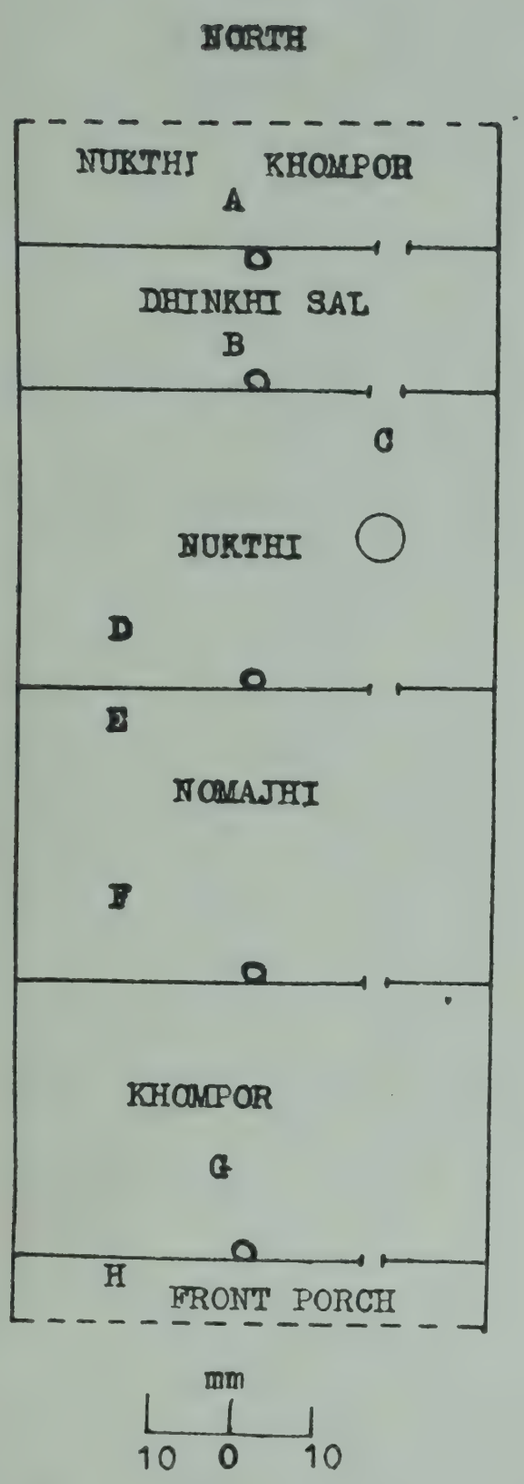


Fig. 5. Ground plan of a Noh (living house) of Amswoi

A Back porch

B Room for husking and storing paddy

C Dining place for women

D Sleeping place for grown up girls and old women

E Dining place for men

F Sleeping place for husband and wife

G Sitting room

H Place for weaving

grown up women, but the yarn can be spun with hand-spindles by small girls. The work is done by all the women in a family, in their spare times. On a fixed time every day cocoons are nurtured by the older women. They grow castor plants near the dwelling house to feed the silk worms with its leaves. The eri cloth is tough, durable and can be washed clean with home-made alkali. Weaving of eri silk is common among all the Bodo speaking tribes of Assam. It is an ethnocultural speciality by which they can be distinguished from almost all the other tribes of Assam. The Lahungs being culturally akin

to them share this trait as well as the associated one of the manufacture of lac. Cotton weaving is perhaps not an old occupation with the Bodo tribes. Had it been so, it would have been found as an original trait with the Garos and in certain Naga and NEFA tribes who are not less autochthonous than the Bodos.

Another ancient trait of the Lalungs of Amswoi is the cultivation of wet paddy by irrigation. It is no longer widely found in the other areas of Assam inhabited the Bodos, but nor has it entirely disappeared. In the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the Bodo areas this system of indigenous irrigation still continues [Syamchaudhuri 1966 : 296-301, Endle 1911 : 12-13].

Adherance to the traditional mode of socio-economic norm is natural for a tribal society, whose basic needs for food, shelter and clothing are met by a self-sufficient economy. The changes that have come about in the Lalung economy are mainly confined to the increase in the purchasing power through the production of areca, jute, sugarcane, coconut and other cash crops. The money earned is spent on commodities which are not grown or produced locally.

The income from the cash crops has diverted the indigenous economic system towards uneven distribution of liquid wealth. Those householders who have spare land grow cash crops and spend the income to by manufactured goods, such as shoes, cosmetic, soap and fancy cloth.

But this individual inequality has not yet upset the total balance of the economic life. The growth of cash crops has not been entirely fortuitous in the Lalung economy.

No ethnic group or community in north-eastern India has ever been able to live an isolated life, with a productive system confined all to itself. Recorded accounts dating from as far back as the sixth century indicate the existence of a well organized system of trade and commerce in the plains of Assam. It is likely that tribal groups living in the Brahmaputra Valley as well as in the surrounding hills had economic relationships with other complex plains communities through exchange of merchandise like lac, cotton, salt and iron implements. At least for the three essential commodities pottery, iron and salt, the tribal groups by large were dependent on the integrated and more specialized rural economy that flourished under the organized states of the various ruling powers in the past.

The Lalungs, living both in the plains and the hills, have been in contact with the neighbouring indigenous rural communities through the bonds of mutual exchange of commodities, like cotton, lac, arecanut, iron and pottery. In the southern part of the Nowgong district specially along the river routes there were many marts in which these commodities were exchanged. When the British administration spread in these parts, these marts proceed to be a profitable source of revenue.

Through such links as have continued to the present time, self-contained economy of the Lalungs has been integrated to the larger impersonal cash economy of the country as a whole. The process has been slow as it depended on the development of trade and communication. As a sequel of the growing dependence on cash economy, certain changes have taken place in the cultural sphere specially in the mode of making and using of dress.

Formerly, in the plains all types of cloths namely *riha,* a kind of wrapper, *mekhala,* a wide skirt, which a varieties of long and short stoles and loin cloth used to be woven from homespun yarn of cotton grown in the village. But women no longer spin. All cotton yarn required for rihas, mekhalas and stoles, wrappers and napkins are purchased.

A large part of cash earned by selling areca, paddy and occasionally jute is spent on mill-made yarn and dresses such as *dhuti* [loin cloth] and sometimes shirts and trousers for the boys. But this dependence on external sources of supply has not yet deeply shaken the production base of the Lalung economy as their primary needs of food and shelter are satisfied internally through their own cooperative efforts.

Nevertheless, it has to a certain extent diluted the indigenous character of their productive activities, making them dependent on manufacture based on cash economy. Besides, through the production and selling of cash crops the householder tends to accumulate and hold individually a purchasing power that renders him partly independent of and so indifferent to the corporate economic life of his community. When he raises cash crops such as areca, banana, jute and sugarcane he does it independent of the labour organization of the community. The need for cash is felt by everybody for salt, match-boxes, kerosine oil and cloth which have to be bought. But the money with which these are purchased is to be earned by one's own individual efforts. The productive activities which are confined within

one's homestead land are mainly one's own responsibility. One does not expect help from the community for growing cash crops or vegetables in the homestead land.

A dichotomy has always existed in the Lalung economy in the plains. In so far as it falls within one's domestic jurisdictions, it has been essentially a home economy in which production is carried out by the members of a household forming a 'private' unit. The other part of the dichotomy has been its corporate character or cooperation between the members of the community. The economic solidarity springs from a common cultural identity, and in-group consciousness of living together in the same village.

Circulation of cash money has added a new dimension in the Lalung economy by imparting a sense of acquisition of economic power in the individual in contrast to the corporate attitude towards the community life as a whole. It has brought in an urge for consolidating the homestead economy, but the swing towards individualism has been less powerful than the bonds that hold the community together as a cohesive economic group.

The largely self-contained Lalung economy has lived up to the industrial productive complexities in the material development of the country at large. But within this totality, the spontaneity of socio-economic dynamism of direct relationships of individuals cooperating within the two poles of demand and supply in basic needs has not disappeared altogether.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RELIGION

Lalung religion is not a code of sophisticated theological doctrine or some massianic teachings. It is an integral part of the overall pattern of social conduct in all spheres, secular, sacerdotal and spiritual.

Individuals who play specific roles in the socio-religious activities, have no sanctity about them and their importance varies according to the basic purposes of the ceremonies in which they participate. The village priest or loro does the sacerdotal office in all the religious ceremonies. He is not a preceptor but a specialist in the traditional priestly functions. The office is not hereditary, but in practice one of his sons, normally the eldest, succeeds him after his death or retirement. But then he must have satisfied the rule of the residence after marriage in the Lalung society and have gone to live with his wife. A loro who goes back to the house of his birth on divorce, loses his priestly position.

The loro has an assistant known as hadari whom he selects himself. The hadari succeeds the loro if he retires or dies without any son to follow him.

The role of the loro is different from that of the *ojha,* the village magician, in concept and function. The latter is a diviner of evil eyes and spirits. He wards off and exorcises and placates malevolent spirits by ritual sacrifices of fowls, pigeons and ducks and with offerings of the blood. He uses a code language unintelligible to the laity in his communications with the spirits.

The socio-religious ceremonies may be treated under three broad heads so far as the purposes are concerned, namely, Agricultural, Festal and Eschatological.

Agricultural

In the Lalung calendar, the first socio-religious ceremony of the year, called *Bohag-pisu,* comes off in the month of April. It continues for about a month. Before it commences the women weave new wrappers and stoles to be presented to their hus-

bands, children and near kins on the occasion. The bura-khel, the council of the village elders, fixes a day by common consent and formally announces the beginning. By convention, this day is a Tuesday. Early in the morning the eldest man of the family performs a small ritual in front of the shed where cattle are stalled. In a place cleared for the purpose two bamboo sticks are stuck with a small piece of home-spun cotton yarn, tied on top of each. The yarn in the stick on the left of the propitiator facing it is soaked in mustard oil, while the other one on his right is decorated with flowers. Under it more flowers are kept on a tender banana leaf. This bamboo stick represents a deity called *Malthakur,* who is the guardian of the livestock. He is believed to reside in the shed in front of which the sticks have been stuck. The ritual begins with the burning of the yarn soaked in mustard oil. As it burns a red cock is beheaded after some of the feathers from the tail and wings have been taken out and placed on the banana leaf. The blood from the neck is dropped on them. The ojha sits close to the man performing the ritual and keeps on chanting incantations as the cock is sacrificed and its blood offered.[1]

The whole process of sacrifice and offering is to be done before the yarn burns out. Later the sacrificed bird along with the severed head is taken home.

When all the houses have made their offerings, the cattle of the entire village are taken out by the youngmen in a group, for a ritual wash in a stream nearby. The women also go with them. After the animals have been washed the old neck-ropes are thrown away and new ones are tied. They are pelted by the men and the women with slices of gourd and brinjal with a prayer that they should grow big and healthy. They are then let loose to graze in the fields.

The youngmen now have a sport of javelin throw, on a target of banana stem, set up on the ground. This apparently is a survival of the now dead practice of hunting with spears.

All return to the village by noon. The main work on that day is the cooking of the ceremonial food with the meat of the cock sacrificed to Malthakur. It is cooked with pieces of gourd and other vegetables. It is the principal item in the menu on that day.

The borjela of the family has to be invited to partake of this and the head is his special portion. He is the first to eat and others are served only after he has eaten. It is obligatory

for the borjela to pay visit to each and every family where one born in his clan of birth has married. This custom is a mark of the social recognition of the importance of the borjela as the eldest male among the matrilineal kins.

The boys and the girls spend the evening in dance and song in different groups in different houses. The occasion for formal performance comes on the next day. There is a particular place in the village called *Bihu-toli,* where the youngmen and women dance and sing. The older people do not go there. It is usually an affair of the young. Intimacy between the boys and the girls which often ends in marriage grows at this time. The dance in the Bihu-toli is performed for about ten days, till late hours of night. The ceremony comes to an end on the next day with the paying of respect to the elders. After an early morning bath, the housewife formally presents a stole or wrapper to her husband bowing down before him while offering it. Young girls give stoles or wrappers to their prospective husbands or lovers but privately. The children also get stoles or wrappers from their parents. As they accept these they bow down and touch the feet of their parents as a mark of respect.

The Bohag-pisu is followed by a festival called *Chongkhong Phujah.* Fields should not be ploughed before the ceremony, even if the time is high for it. If, however, anybody feels that he must plough before the festival, he may do so, but in payment of a fine of a pair of fowls to the headman who receives them on behalf of the council of elders.

The principal functionaries in this festival are the loro and his assistant the hadari, and they get themselves ritually purified before it starts. On an appointed day the loro, the hadari, the ojha and the musician go with the elder men of the village to a place near the paddy field. The priest takes with him leaves of the sacred basil in a brass pot, filled with water, certain other leaves and two cocks and two hens. The place where the ritual is to be performed is cleaned with hoe and a small rectangular altar of earth is built. The priest and his assistant take bath in a stream. After this they place on the altar one hundred and ten *tara* leaves, one upon another. In front of the altar, the priest plants seven small bamboo twigs and on either side of each two tiny pieces of reed, in a line. A pot full of rice-beer is kept in front of the bamboo twigs ; on the top of the tara leaves rice is heaped topped by a silver ring. An egg of a hen is placed on this ring. The loro sprinkles water from the brass pot which he has carried himself on his assistant and all the persons present for

purification. He then reads the omen by dropping simultaneously on the altar two pieces of bamboo and by cutting the eggs into two in the same way as in the *Kheljewa*[1]. If the omen is good the harvest is going to be good also.

After the divination, the fowls are sacrificed and blood is dropped on the altar. The visceras of this bird are taken out one by one to see if there are any black spots in them. If there be any, that would be a bad sign for the next cultivation. After examination, the visceras are placed on these altars. Small pieces of meat are cut from the breast and the wings and strung together in a thin strip of bamboo and cooked with the rest of the meat. The magician does not take any active part but he keep on chanting his incantations from the divination to the beheading of the fowl by the priest.

The ritual is for the purification and protection of the priest and the villagers from the evil eye of the malevolent spirits. The pieces of meat strung together are first offered to the spirits on the altar. After this the ceremonial meal is served to all along with the rice beer. All go back to the village after this holy repast.

The ceremonial purification of the loro is the first rite in the Chongkhong. It divines the prospects of the coming cultivation also. In the week that follows the villagers clean their houses, clothes and the entire homestead area. The village paths are also cleaned by the youngmen. Plenty of rice beer is brewed and varieties of rice-cakes are baked in every house. On the appointed day, all the villagers go out to fish. They fish jointly and the catch is taken to the bachelors' hall, to be divided equally among those who have participated in the fishing. An extra share goes only to the headman.

Early in the morning on the following day all the grown up men again assemble at a particular place in the paddy field outside the homestead area. Every one takes with him a brass-pot full of rice and hand it over to the cook, specially appointed to prepare the ceremonial food to be served there. Such cooks are known by the name *sajanis*. They cook on all ceremonial occasions except the festal *Sagramechewa*.

Custom enjoins that one man from every house should join in the Chongkhong with a pot of rice and a jar of beer as contribution. A special session of the village council is held at that place to review if all the decisions of the council of elders have

The Bihu dancers with their musical instruments

The girls are dancing on the occasion of the Bihu

The man is propitiating the Malthakur with offering of blood and head of the sacrificed fowl

been carried out. All fines imposed by the council have to be paid before the Chongkhong ceremony. The headman of the village maintains a record of the defaulters and makes them pay up. Rice or money realised in this way go to the preparation of the ceremonial meal. The money usually is spent on a big and fat pig. All the time the village council seats in session, the priest is busy with his ritual at the place where the first purificatory rite has been performed. He builds with earth four ceremonial altars each one for a particular deity, *viz., Bagh Raja, Jol-thol devata, Mahadev* or *Hojaidew* and *Chari-bhai Chari-kora.*

The altar for the Bagh Raja is built first on the left of the worshipper facing it. A twig of bamboo with leaves on it, is planted on the ground in front of the altar ; this is called *mindai-kham, i.e.,* the post of the god (*mindai*—deity, *kham*—post)[2]. Folded leaves of mango are hung like a garland on the top of it. A gourd-shell of beer is placed near it. Three sets of tender banana leaves are spread on the altar behind the twig. On them rice is heaped into a dome topped by an egg of a hen, on a silver ring. The next altar on the right is for the *Jol-thol* deity. It is divided into seven equal parts with lines scratched on the surface. The tip of a banana leaf is placed in each of these with an areca nut and a betel, rice and leaves of the sacred basil as offerings to the deity. The next altar is for the god *Mahadev* or *Hojaidew.* A tiny platform with bamboo sticks is made on it, where he is supposed to take his seat. In front of it stands a pot of beer and by it, on five banana leaves, small quantity of areca nuts are kept. On the last altar in the extreme right, for the *Chari-bhai Chari-kora,* 210 long tara leaves are placed one upon another, with rice and silver ring and an egg of a hen on the top. But before placing this the priest sets up in front of the altar seven branches of bamboo twigs in the manner described.

The next part of the ritual consist of divination by breaking egg and offering of blood of decapitated fowls, as in the ritual of Malthakur. Small pieces of meat from the breast and the hind part of the birds are cooked for the deity. He is invoked in a chant by the priest for a good rain in the cultivation season. This done the deities are offered their portions of the food. The meat of the fowls, including those collected as fines and of the pig bought and the rice contributed by the villagers are cooked by the sajanis.

The *deuri* serves the ceremonial meal, as it is his duty on festal occasions. After the feast, the youngmen dance around the altars with long bamboo sticks. The movements are in imitation of hoeing in cultivation, the old men instructing them in the steppings. They dance again in the evening at the house of the priest. The next day no work is done in the village. No one touches any implement. This taboo is directed by the priest. It marks the end of the Chongkhong ceremony.

As the monsoon breaks, the villagers get busy with ploughing and sowing. No religious ceremony interrupts it, but to propitiate Mahadev and his consort in the year of Kheljewa. It has been described in the Chapter Three.

Only after the crops have been sown a minor rituals called *Laijulekhewana* is performed in the same way as the Chongkhong. In it the loro and his assistant sacrifice to the guardian spirits of the crops for protection of the crops from birds, insects and wild animals. The ojha assists with his incantations.

When the crops have grown, another propitiatory rite is performed at the same place for the welfare of the village and its crops. Altars are built as in the Chongkhong, but offerings are not all the same. The arrangement of the altars and the things offered and sacrificed to them are shown in the subjoined table :

Khor Raja or *Bon Raja* or *Bagh Raja*	*Jol-thol devata*	*Mahadev*	*Chari-bhai Chari-kora*
One spotted cock, two broad leaves, silver ring and egg on rice, boiled rice, betel and areca nut, one each.	On a banana leaf seven areca nuts and seven betels and unboiled rice.	One cock, one hen. One silver ring and an egg on rice, boiled rice on banana leaves and one jar of rice beer.	One hundred eighty tara leaves, seven hens, silver ring and egg on rice, boiled rice on banana leaf and a jar of rice beer.

In this function, the youngmen usually have not much to do. There is no dance and singing. Though all the deities, namely, Bagh Raja, Jol-thol, Mohadev and Chari-bhai Chari-kora are propitiated, it is the Chari-bhai Chari-kora who gets more fowls than the others.

This ceremony is called Tusuma, that is offering of *suma* or fowls. These sacrifices are particularly for the well-being of the people of the village and the crops grown by them. In Tusuma, the tiger king or Bagh Raja is distinguished by two

other names *Khor Raja* and *Bon Raja*. The former appears to be the Lalung term for tiger and the latter adopted from Assamese, mean the king of the forest, and these deify the tiger as the lord of the jungle.

Mahadev in this ceremony is also called Hojaidew, as the deity who resides in the hill (*hojai,* the Lalung word for hill, and *dew,* god or deity). The conception of Mahadev as a deity residing in the hills corresponds with a similar tradition in Hinduism (Dasgupta 1962 : 294-99).

When the Tusuma is over it is time to cut bamboo in the jungle. This is important because wild bamboo matures after the rains. They are to be cut and brought to the village for construction of the house and for making basketry. All should get their bamboos from the forest between the Tusuma and the harvesting of crops, to avoid any risk of these getting burnt in forest-fires, so common in the dry hot months of March and April.

But before going to the forest to collect bamboo the *Washirawane-phujah* has to be performed. In the month of October, the priest fixes a Wednesday in consultation with the council of elders. The elders and the youngmen accompanied by the priest and his assistant go to the place where the Chongkhong was celebrated. The priest with the help of his assistant builds an altar for the deity Chari-bhai Chari-kora in the same way as in the Chongkhong. His offerings are one egg, rice, the blood of a cock and rice beer. Omens are read on a split egg and the intestines of the cock. One speciality that distinguishes this ritual from those for the others, is that a bamboo section is cut into two by the priest in front of the altar and placed on it as the last offering to the Chari-bhai Chari-kora. The rice beer is then taken by all.

Young men skilled in playing on drums and flutes stage a dance in front of the altar before going back to the village and continue it there at the houses of the priest and the *pator,* who organises the work of the young girls weaving new dress to be worn by the boys on the occasion of the festival of *Sagrame-chewa,* the headman and other important elders of the village, in the borghars of the clans where oblations are offered to the clan ancestresses and at the house of birth of their maternal uncles or where they have taken residence after marriage. The visits to the maternal uncles' of all the dancers are obligatory ; if there be no one of any of the group they go to the next

nearest male matrilineal kin in the ascending or descending order.

During the dance, the aunts entertain them liberally with rice beer and delicacies. The boys on this occasions make merry with drink and food. They take the liberty, at this time, of cutting light jokes with aunts and sing songs asking them to take their husbands from among them. The aunts are not supposed to take any offence, rather as a mark of approval they present their nephews fowls to take home with them. There is a belief that if the birds are reared they grow healthy and lay more eggs than the ordinary hens do. With this ends the Washirawane and the villagers go to the jungle to get their bamboos. The rituals connected with the Chongkong, Leijulekhewana, Tusuma and Washirawane do not, however, end without a formal farewell to the deities. There is a fixed day on which this, called *Sunikeranane phujah* takes place. Invariably, it falls in the first Saturday following the ceremony.

In the morning, the elders including the headman, the priest and his assistant go to the bachelors' hall where they sit in a session to check if the decisions of the bura-khel on the past disputes have been carried out and the punishment awarded. After this all go for the things required for the rituals, kept ready in the house of the priest.

Most of the articles are as for the other occasions, but there are others which symbolically represent the spirit of the deity Suni. It is believed that this spirit comes in the village when ceremonies are performed and stays in the *golmohur* or the peacock flower tree (*Poniciana pulcherrima*). Fourteen branches, each about two feet high, are cut from a tree and the leaves and the bark taken off. They are marked with black and yellow rings in an alternate sequence painted with charcoal and turmeric respectively. These called Malbaris are set up side by side, in a line, in front of the bachelors' hall, by the priest. The other ritual things, namely, rice, beer, betels, areca nuts, etc., are kept inside the hall in baskets. The elder men accompanied by the priest and his assistant sit facing the Malbaris drinking rice beer.

By this time, the youngmen of the village have assembled in the hall. All then set out for a place in the outskirts of the village, carrying the ritual things, to be offered to the deities. The baskets are taken by the youngmen and on the way, they shout, "*Hei krru, Hei krru* . . ." several times. The priest takes

the fourteen branches of golmohur and carry them with him.

On the way, they stop where the settlement area ends, by the side of the cremation ground. Near it, a space is cleaned with hoe where a rite is performed in the name of Suni. The priest sets up here seven of the fourteen branches, he carries, in a line and facing them seven small twigs of bamboo (*chungi*) on which he notches marks to represent the rungs of a ladder. Then he draws nine concentric circles on the ground around a fixed point in three sets in different colours, as described in the *kheljewa* (*see* Chapter Three). In the centre appears the usual offering of rice-pyramid with the silver ring and a hens egg on the top. The conventional divination with the egg and two pieces of split bamboos also follows.

The purpose of this rite is to let the spirit of Suni go up the ladder and depart as he is capable of bringing calamities to the village. It is believed that from that place he goes to a place under the banyan tree carrying with them the remaining things. There the priest makes three altars side by side. This ritual is similar on the whole to others already described. The order of precedence accorded to the deity from the left to the right and the things offered to them are given here in a tabular form. It will bring out their relative importance in this rite.

Mahadev	*Jol-thol devata*	*Cari-bhai* *Cari-kora*
Nine betels and nine areca nuts on banana leaves, four bamboo twigs erected in front, a pot of rice beer, concentric circles marked in front of the bamboo with silver ring and egg on rice in centre. One cock and one hen sacrificed, boiled rice and meat offered.	This altar is divided into seven equal parts. On each of them are placed a handful of rice, a betel and an areca nut.	210 numbers of *kou* leaves on the altar, one upon another, with handful of rice, seven areca nuts and seven betels on the top. Seven *Malbaris* as the symbols of *Suni* are erected in front. A pot of rice beer boiled meat and rice are offered.

As the priest conducts the ritual and the *sajanis* prepare this ceremonial meal, the elders sit on one side to discuss the spring festival, the *Sagramechewa*. It is usually held at the end of February or in early March, starting on a Sunday or a Wednesday. On this occasion, they select one officer called *pator* and direct him to keep special dresses of silk yarn spun at home by the girls, to be worn by the boys at their dance of Sagramechewa. By the time, these are settled the priest has finished his rites and the food which has been cooked is offered at the altars

of Mahadev and Chari-bhai Chari-kora. All take their meals after that and go back to the village. Suni stays back in his abode in the banyan tree under which he has been offered the farewell meal along with the Chari-bhai Chari-kora. None of the deties are represented anthropomorphically, but during the rites they are believed to occupy the altars allotted to them where the offerings are made.

They do not leave the village after the rites, but stay on in the bachelors' hall till the ceremonial farewell.

Suni is a malevolent deity, and has no ceremonial altar dedicated to him as the others. But he comes along with them and stays in a golmohur tree in the village. The priest leads him out but not back to his abode out of fear. Within the village ceremonial contacts with him are avoided. He is placated at the place where he lives by the *Malbaris,* to escape harm by him. The dieties who are carried to the abode of Suni, for the farewell rite, protect the villagers from his malice.

The winter paddy ripes after the Washirawane and the priest performs a small rite called *Maisisa,* or ceremonial reaping of paddy before harvesting starts. Early at dawn on a Wednesday fixed by him, the priest goes to the borghar, of the clan of his birth accompanied by its senior members. They squat while he sprinkles sacred water on them and all take beer in honour of the presiding deity of the house, Mahadev. While sprinkling the priest keeps on muttering *pa Mahadev*. The word pa in Lalung stands for father or lord. Then he goes to the paddy field and plucks a number of ears and binds them into five or seven separate bunches, according to the number of the original ancestresses of the clan of his birth. He carries them straight to the borghar and hangs them on the wall near the place where food is taken on ceremonial occasions. After this all the men assembled there drink and disperse to their houses. Then the *jela* of each clan performs the rite in the main borghar of his own clan. With this the reaping starts. On the day of the Maisisa youngmen start practicing singing and dancing for the coming spring festival Sagramechewa.

The agricultural ceremonies and rituals connected with production comes to an end with this ceremony.

Festal Ceremonies

Rice husked from the new paddy is taken after a formal

eating at the *Magh-pisu*. The day for this is fixed by the council of elders, which is generally the first Tuesday of the month of *Magh* according to the Assamese calendar. The youngmen play the main role, the elders also join but after the priliminary preparations. A few days before the Magh-pisu, the boys select one of their seniors, married or unmarried, to guide and direct them. They call him *parokual,* "leader of the cowherds", though now-a-days neither the boys nor the elder men take the cattle to pasture, it being left to the settlers from other communities near the village.

The boys under the parokual are known as *palis,* that is the helpers. They raise money from the villagers to buy rice for beer, to be brewed in a house selected by the parokual. This is to be consumed at the time of the celebration.

Two or three days before the celebration the parokual and his boys build a large gabled hut, which is called marono, with bamboo and straw in a paddy field. On the Tuesday all go there. The parokual and his boys erect a pole a little away from the marono. Dry branches are piled around it and bamboo and straw are heaped over the pile, to make it into a large conical dome. This is called *meji*. The small boys also make their small toys mejis.

In the afternoon the men, at least one from each house, go to a stream on a community fishing. All the fish caught are taken to the marono for a feast. Fish must be taken on the Magh-pisu.

After the sun has set a big fire is made before the marono, and the elders take their seat on the ground around it, take beer and sing with the music of the drums played by the youngmen, as the parokual and his boys assisted by the other youngmen cook the fish and rice, pork and fowls. The rice is from the newly harvested paddy, the *pali* boys have collected. The older men retire after the feast. But the parokual, his boys and the other youngmen stay back in the marono for a night of revelry with dance and song and drink. Early in the morning they have a bath in the stream. The parokual sets the meji on fire, preceded by chanting before it by the *ojha* to the Chari-bhai Chari-kora, who is asked to protect the village from fire. The younger boys burn the smaller mejis themselves. The marono itself may be burnt, not on that day but not much latter either.

The new rice may be cooked in the house only after all the mejis have been burnt. No family should eat its new rice by itself on the first day. Friends and relatives should be invited to take it with them. It would be deemed mean and improper not to share first eating with others. A well-to-do householder may even invite the whole village.

The village now prepares for the spring festival Sagramechewa, which literally means the dance for all (*sagra*—all, and *mechewa*—dance)[3]. In this deka-khel takes the leading part with its leader the changdoloi. Preparations start in the two months preceding it. The day on which it is to begin has already been fixed by the elders on the occasion of the last *Suniknerane phujah,* following the Washirawana ceremony. The youngmen have been rehearsing special songs and dances for the festival since the *Maisisa* ceremony. The drums and flutes have been lying on a cross-beam under the roof of the bachelors' hall. On a specified day changdoloi issues them to the boys for practising.

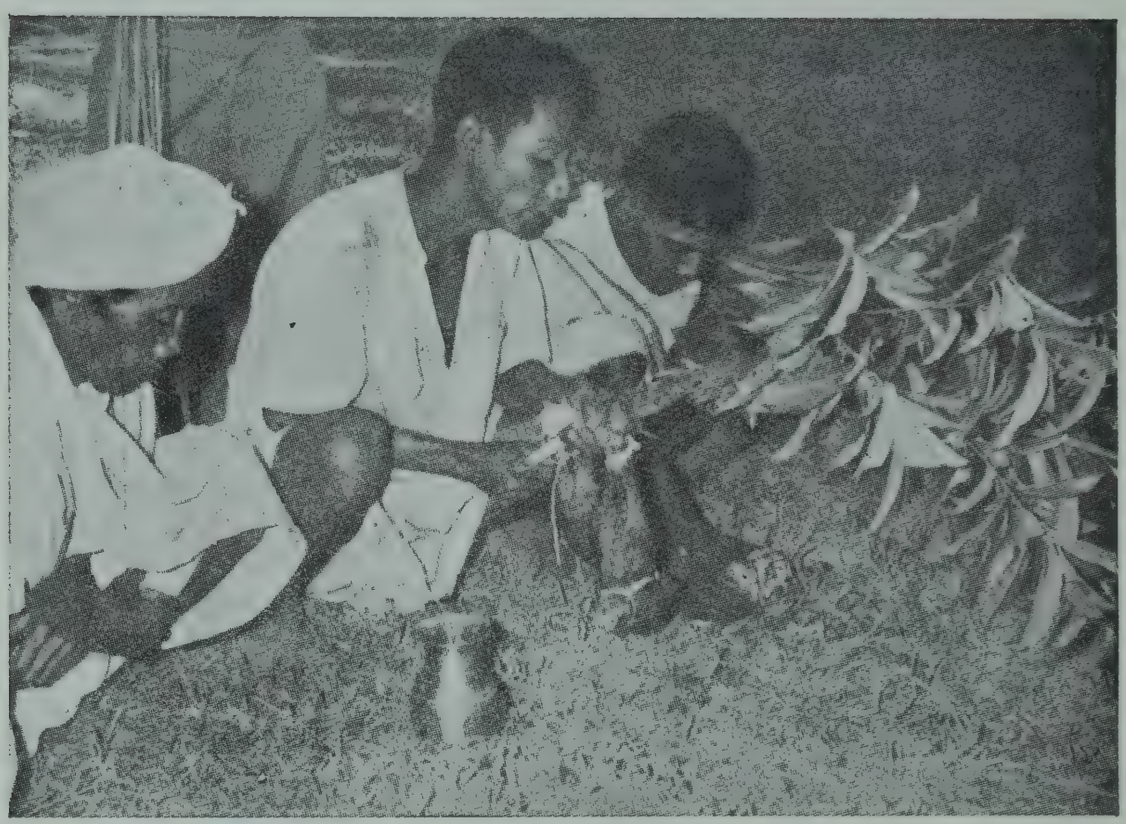
Early in the morning the priest and his assistant, the changdoloi, his assistant the changmajhi and the company of the musician (*Ojha-khel Phat-khel*) with their leader assemble in the bachelors' hall. The priest ceremonially purifies the place inside as well as outside the hall, with sacred water sprinkled with *dubar bon* (*cynodon, dactylon*).

All then go out, and stand in front of the hall. The priest reads omens on a split egg, spreads a banana leaf, on the ground, and asks the changdoloi to take out the drums and the flutes. The changdoloi does as requested and keeps the drums and the flutes on the banana leaf. Then the priest asks him to direct the leader of the musician to take the instruments and to repair them if necessary. As this is done bowls of rice beer is drunk by all. In the evening the musicians, the changdoloi, the priest and the council of elders again visit the bachelors' hall. A fire of bamboo is made. The elders sit around and drink and the musicians practise on the drums and flutes and dance around the fire.

On the next Wednesday when the youngmen and musicians assemble for a rehearsal, the changdoloi asks them to get bamboo for new flutes the next day. They call it *Pangsi-tana* literally drawing of bamboo flute (*Pangsi,* flute ; *tana,* drawing). With the priest and his assistant they go to the jungle and clean a small area near a small hill for a ceremony. The changdoloi

The men are dropping rice beer in the name of Mahadev before taking food

The priest (loro) is drawing concentric circles before the Malbaries for the ritual of Sunikerane



The priest (in the middle) and his assistant (on the right) are ritually offering the pig and fowl to the Chari-bhai Chari-kora and the Suni

sets up the *Mindai-kham* of *madar* tree (*Atrocarpur lacoocha*), to represent the Chari-bhai Chari-kora, the presiding deity of the bamboo grove.[4]

A pot of rice beer specially brewed with a special kind of leaf in it, that grows in the hill is offered by the changdoloi. Seven tara leaves, large and long with sharp tips are spread in front of the Mindai-kham with one piece of areca nut and a betel leaf on each. To the left on another tara leaf one piece of areca and a betel leaf are served to the departed lineal kins. Lastly, seven pieces of bamboo fetched from the jungle and seven of the new bamboo flutes made on the spot are offered to the Mindai-kham by the changdoloi, as he utters, under the guidance of the priest a prayer to the deity for cutting more good bamboos for new flutes for the spring festival. After this the rice beer offered to the deity is drunk by all. All then go into the jungle and collect the bamboos that they need. Before they leave the place they break the seven pieces of bamboo and the seven flutes which were offered to the Mindai-kham, against the sacred sapling of deity. They go back to the village singing songs with the refrain "Hei Krru, Hei Krru . . . " and assemble at the house of the changdoloi.

The headman and the elders are informed of their return with bamboo. They come, examine them, instruct the changdoloi to keep them carefully and return after a drink. The following day the youngmen collect firewood from the jungle and store them in the bachelors' hall to be used in the festival. Another day they collect *kou* leaves to serve food during the festival, and store them in the house of the changdoloi. The week after the Pangsi-tana, the weekly rehearsal for the Sagramechewa dance, stops.

In the evening, the youngmen, the elders, the priest with his assistant and the musicians assemble in the bachelors' hall. The changdoloi makes a fire in the yard. The musicians play the drums and the flutes and to that music the boys go around the fire dancing and singing of the Sagramechewa. On conclusion the youngmen's leader with his assistant goes inside the dormitory and prays to the presiding spirits to forgive them any mistakes committed by them in the rehearsal. The priest then goes behind the hall alone for an egg-divination. The whole party has a drink in the house of the changdoloi before retiring for the night.

Three days after. approval of the *borkabi* (the main middle

post of the bachelors' hall) is sought and the new flutes are made. A pot of beer, seven areca nuts and an equal number of betels are placed on a kou leaf near the post. The changdoloi then asks leave of it to make the flutes. All then drink the beer, light a fire and begin to make the flutes from the bamboo they have collected. Making of new flutes is called *Phangsi-phalawane*. It does not take long. In the afternoon, the youngmen collect fresh bamboo from the jungle for a fire around which they will dance and sing at the festival. None should fail in this customary obligation. Their leader receives the bamboo at the bachelors' hall. If there is any defaulter, he fines him one basket of rice which is used to make the beer for the festival. All the boys who have collected bamboo go to his house with cups of bamboo in which they are served drink. In the evening, elders collect at bachelors' hall for deliberations on the preparation of the rice beer, to be taken during the festival. They put the changdoloi in the charge and he makes it with the help of the youngmen from rice taken from the village granary. The following two days are spent in cleaning all the village paths and the places where the ceremonies for Sagramechewa are to be performed. They then collect from the jungle edible roots and vegetables and leaves called *lailung* for mixing them with the fermenting rice from which the beer is to be prepared for the Sagramechewa. They build in the yard of the bachelors' hall a platform for the drums and another small one by the post of borkabi, for the new flutes. The changdoloi plants a *madar* (*Atrocarpus lacoocha*) sapling at one end of the village settlement, to represent the Chari-bhai Chari-kora. In the afternoon, the youngmen go to the bachelors' hall where they offer to their leader areca nuts and betels wrapped in kou leaves, as a mark of respect. He keeps them with him, to be paid as fine to the council of elders for any fault on the part of his boys during the festival, as he is responsible for their conduct.

The main function of the Sagramechewa begins on that night. The whole village has to observe rigorous taboos for four days from the evening. The barikhas go around the village announcing the taboos which are many and extensive. Nobody is to (i) wear shoes, (ii) put on pantaloons, (iii) ride bicycle or any other vehicle, (iv) wash clothes, (v) husk and pound paddy, (vi) go for fishing, (vii) weave, (viii) plough or hoe, (ix) cut firewood or bamboo, (x) touch the granary, (xi) touch the musical instrument to be used in dance in the Sagramechewa (the

musicians excepted), (xii) use stick or umbrella, (xiii) smoke outside the dance-yards, (xiv) have guests at house and (xv) spend nights at home but to be present at the dances.

The changdoloi sets a special group of his boys called phura-khel to watch if these are correctly observed. They report the breaches and the offenders are later punished by the council. The pator has a special function in this. The boys of the phura-khel as bachelors cannot go inside the houses ; the pator is married and so he is used for vigilance in that section of the village.

Late at night the priest invites the elders to be present at an offering of oblations to the Chari-bhai Chari-kora in his house. The Lalungs of Nambor call it a tiwana Chari-bhai phujah, that is worship of the Chari-bhai of the Lalungs (*Tiwa*).

It is performed in the borghar where usually meals are taken. This is a separate hut, divided into two rooms by a partition. The dining room opens on the eastwhile the other, used for cooking, opens on the west ; the two are connected by a door on one side of the dividing partition.

On the floor near the right wall of the dining room the priest arranges kou leaves one upon another. On this Chari-bhai Chari-kora is supposed to take his seat. To the right of these lie seven pieces of banana leaves each with an areca nut and a betel on it, as offerings to the departed and the matrilineal ancestresses. On another leaf, the deity has as his offerings a large number of areca nuts and betels with rice, powder as well as grains, and a few pots of beer. A red cock and a hen are sacrificed by the priest and the blood, as in all other rites, is let to drop on the rice and the other offerings. The priest then reads omen on the intestines as in the chongkhong ceremony. A ritual meal prepared by the priest and his assistant is first laid before the deity and afterwards taken by all. Before leaving his house the headman on behalf of the village council gives seven areca nuts and seven betels to the priest. They go to the bachelors' hall where the priest places two tender banana leaves near the post of borkabi, with the usual rice-ring-egg offering. The whole area inside and outside the hall is ceremonially purified with water sprinkled from a pot with leaves of the sacred basil.

A part of the courtyard of the bachelors' hall is cleaned. Here the changdoloi divines on an egg and kindles a fire with

bamboo. After that the members of the deka-khel start dancing around the fire singing the songs of Sagramechewa to the accompaniment of the music of drums and flutes by the *Ojha-khel phat-khel.*

The Sagramechewa songs have no religious or supernatural theme. They are songs of love and beauty of nature :

"The leaf of the gourd-vine
is lovely to behold.
Its sets you a-thinking
can it be yours or not !
Ah no ! it is not my luck to possess it."
Ye hei, su, su, su, (refrain)
Ye hei, su, su, su,
Owo, owo, ...".
Or,
"The oldman made a fan, so very, very pretty,
If his daughter be mine,
I'd fan her all night.
Ye hei, su, su, su, (refrain)
. . . . . ".

They sing of girls come to see their dance, of their smile so sweet and of their movements as graceful as of the deer in the wood. Melodious wrablings and enchanting dances of forest birds are also described in some of the songs.

They dance and sing the whole night repeating each item seven times. When one group is tired another takes its place. Similarly, the musicians also change turns. But the music, singing and dancing go on uninterrupted until they are formally stopped in the fourth night.

At the day-break all the youngmen, and the elders go to the house of the priest. Some of the youngmen carry burning cinders from the fire kindled by the changdoloi in the courtyard of the bachelors' hall. They stage a dance there and select the next house of visit. The houses to be selected should have courtyards spacious enough to hold the whole gathering. The changdoloi sends messengers ahead to the house selected and follows with the others. They carry with them beer and rice and vegetables to be cooked. On this occasion, certain leaves and roots that grow wild in the jungle are taken with rice. The fire kindled by the changdoloi must be kept burning all the time the dancing and singing last. They also dance and sing all their

way to the houses of visit for once started the dance cannot stop.

Persons are specially appointed to cook and distribute and otherwise look after the food. The phandari has in his charge all the articles of food. There may be more than one cook under him. He serves the beer to the elders and the youngmen during the dancing and singing, with a decorum not observed on other occasions. Before serving the beer to the elders, the village messangers, the changdoloi and the members of the vigilance party he offers them water to wash their hands. The beer is served in brass pots to the elders, in cups of the kou leaves to the messengers and to others in bamboo cups. It is not correct to drink as soon as served. All should wait till everybody has got his cup filled, and formally invited to drink.

The phandari has his assistants, the sarumais, who help in cooking and in serving the food and the *tangaria* to assist in getting the beer ready.

The youngmen go to the courtyard of the house of the priest singing and dancing, where a fire has already been lighted with the burning cinders and bamboo brought earlier there by some of the boys.

The village elders are taken to the borghar. Before they enter it they offer a short prayer to Mahadev, who is the presiding deity of every borghar. They take their seat on a mat in the dining apartment while the phandari and his assistant cook the meal in the other room. The articles of food and drink are brought by the changdoloi and the youngmen ; the owner of the house has not to spend on them. In the courtyard the changdoloi and his assistant, the changmajhi sit on a mat while some members of the vigilance party who stay with the dancing boys looking for any breach of rules, sit on another. The others are not offered any seat.

One of the village messengers sits at the door of the borghar to watch the fire in the courtyard. It is his duty to see that nobody touches it. Similarly, another sits at the door of the dining room, looking after the fire inside, around which the elders sit.

Those sitting on mats in the courtyard are not allowed to change their seats. If they do so the watchful messenger reports it to the elders within. They are immediately fined for the breach of law, notwithstanding their official positions. This fine

is paid in areca nuts and betels to the elders. The musicians should not let any persons other than the *tilaukheda,* especially appointed for it, to handle the drums and the flutes used in the festival, even for ever so short a time. To light tabocco for a smoke at the fire around which the youngmen are dancing and singing, one has to get permission form the barikha, who sits at the door of the borghar. Similarly, the elders can smoke only if the phandari lets them have it from the fire in his charge.

The food cooked by the phandari is served on kou leaves to all those who have gathered in the house of the priest to witness and to take part in the dances. The dancers take their meal one after another as the dance must not stop. The elders. the changdoloi and his assistant and the members of the vigilance party eat and drink sitting but the others standing.

In every performance, the dancers repeat each item seven times. As they go into the borghar they dance all the items the same number of times. The drummers stay out as the borghar which is small cannot accommodate them. There they give their last performance.

In the same way, they dance the rest of the day and the next two days in the houses of important village officials, namely, the ojha, the village magician, the *deuri* who serve the ceremonial food, the changdoloi their leader and others. When they dance at the house of the magician, they put on special dresses of *muga* silk, in the keeping of one among them, known as *rebhari.* It consists of a loin cloth, a turban and a piece of cloth would around the lower part of the waist above the loincloth. Here they execute five different dances which they have not yet performed. With this the dancing session ends in the fourth night from the first in the village hall.

In the afternoon of this day, some of the taboos which had been imposed on the day of Tiwana Chari-bhai Chari-kora phujah are lifted. Now people may smoke, wear sewn cloth, shoes and men go to sleep in their own houses. But nobody is allowed to husk paddy or go for fishing until *Sunikerana phujah* is performed.

The festal atmosphere still lingers ; from the last house the youngmen go dancing and carrying the fire to the bachelors' hall. They keep on dancing until they ceremonially put a stop to it at a place, called *Sagrakarasaga* where the changdoloi has erected a mindai-phang that is the branch of a *modar* tree

(*Atrocarpus lacoocha*), the symbol of deity of Chari-bhai Chari-kora. This is a very sad occasion. All the villagers know that the festival is going to end. The women who have not had any part in the dancing and singing come too. In front of the mindai-phang a fire is lit for the last time with the cinders carried there. With the musicians playing their drums and flutes, the young boys dance and sing around it, three items seven times each. The priest then takes a red cock, breaks one of its legs and lets it go in the name of Chari-bhai Chari-kora. The flute players break almost all the flutes by striking them on the mindai-phang and throw them away in the bush or some selected place. One or two flutes only are kept for use. As they go back the musicians play a very doleful tune on these. The wailing notes sadden many a heart and even draw tears from many a woman's eyes.

Late in the night in the bachelors' hall the changdoloi and the changmajhi dance together while the musician play only drums. They are followed by the *sarumai,* the *tangaria,* the tilaukheda and the rebhari who could not take part in the general dances and singings, as they had to attend to other duties.

Last of all the drummers dance to the music of the flutes and the flute-players to the beatings of the drums. None of them perform any of those dances and songs which the others have executed in the last four days. As they dance, the other boys give areca nuts, betels and beer to the elders gathered round a fire, talking of their own past days of Sagramechewa and its origin, to an attentive audience of youngmen. At mid-night, the youngmen go to the house of the changdoloi and he entertains them with beer and food. Next the party calls at the magician where they are served with rice and meat cooked with hot chilli. The next day, in the morning the changdoloi along with his boys collects the burnt cinders from the place where he had made the fire before the dance started and take them to the house of the leader of the musicians. This is a formal recognition of the musicians who have played an important part at the dance. The leader of the musicians treats them to a copious drink. The headman of the village gives a feast on the following day to all the youngmen and their leaders at his house.

On the first Saturday after the festival has been ceremonially concluded, the Sunikerana phujah is performed by the priest in

the usual way. Though only Chari-bhai Chari-kora is propitiated in the Sagramechewa. *Mahadev* and *Jol-thol* are not excluded in the ritual of farewell under the banyan tree at one end of the village.

Festive and ceremonial part of the Sagramechewa ends with the breaking of the flutes, but still Suni remains to be propitiated to avoid any misfortune.

In the morning following the fourth night of the festival, the priest, the changdoloi and their assistants and the musicians carry the musical instruments to the bachelors' hall. The priest approaches the borkabi post and places by it a pot of water with a cake of yeast inside, along with the usual rice with ring and egg. He then sprinkles water on the hall, the drums, and the flutes with sacred basil leaves to purify them. This done he cuts the egg in two with incantations addressed to the borkabi post. The changdoloi and his assistant are then asked to put back the musical instruments and they are deposited on the cross-beam, to stay there for a year.

Eschatological

The mortuary rites and observances in which the spirits of the ancestors and ancestresses are invoked to protect them form diseases and calamities express another side of the life and beliefs of the Lalungs. In them, there is a different kind of supernaturalism in which sacerodotalism is not as important as the social beliefs and in which the kins play a greater role than the priest.

Deaths due to age and illness are considered natural. The dead are cremated. Only if it is a child or a death by epidemic or accident and so unnatural, the bodies are buried. In a death by snake-bite, the body is laid on a raft of banana-stem and floated down a river.

A death is announced by the village messengers, and all the clan relations stop taking out paddy from their granaries for three days. If the death occurs in afternoon or at night, the corpse is kept in the house till the next morning. Cremation is always done in the day, and the relatives attending the funeral have to come back from the cremation ground before night sets in.

Immediately after death, the body is taken out of the bed and laid on a newly made bamboo mat. The senior male member of the family, the jela, is called to the house. If married in the village he comes immediately. But if he lives in another village, he takes time to come and the funeral preparations have to await his arrival. For, he is a *gyati* that is one who is related to the family in blood.

The body is carried to the burning ground on a rectangular bamboo framework made to certain specifications. It consists of two bamboo poles and two sets of split bamboos, one of short and the other of long. In each of these sets, there are as many bamboos as the number of the original ancestresses of the clan to which the person belonged. A man dying in the house of his wife is taken to belong to her clan. When the dead person belongs to the clan of seven original ancestresses, seven long split bamboos are arranged between the two poles, parallel to each other. The shorter pieces are tied across these at equal distances. The work is done under the supervision of the gyati or any other person who belongs to the family of the dead by birth. The body is carried to the ground by men. No woman accompanies them.

Each clan is supposed to have its own space allotted to it in the burning ground. Since these have no permanent marks, the gyati has to find it out by divination, if he is not sure where it lies. He throws an egg at the place he thinks belongs to his clan. If it breaks the spotting has been correct. But if it does not, he picks it up and throws it again at where it has stopped last. The process has to be repeated till the egg breaks and the clan ground has been spotted.

The corpse is burnt on a pyre of bamboo and wood arranged like a trestle. Over it is made a framework like the one used in carrying the body. The body is laid on it over three layers of long heavy saplings, and two more layers of wood are placed over it.

The pyre is the borghar of the dead. The lower part is fenced around leaving an opening on either ends as doors. It is partitioned into two apartments as in the borghar. The body is laid with the head towards the east, as if, he has entered his borghar by the front door.

The gyati sets fire to the pyre through the opening on the side of the head. No remains are collected from the ashes of

the pyre as in Hindu cremation. Those present at the cremation take bath if any stream be there before they go back to village.

But before they enter the settlement area they have to be purified with water sprinkled over them with sacred basil leaves. This is done by the women of the family in which the gyati has married. They come to the house in which the death has taken place with the gyati, and clean it.

Death causes pollution. The house has to be purified by those who belong to a clan different from that of the dead person. The inmates of the house wash their clothes and on that day do not take rice beer, fish and meat and do not take out paddy from the granary nor husk any. All the clan-fellows also abstain from taking fish and meat with them. On the seventh day after cremation, boiled fish, meat, rice, vegetables, and a little beer in a leaf cup are kept at one corner of the domicile for the departed spirit.

Obligation of the living towards the dead do not end till all the members of the clan have made offerings of food and articles used by them, at a certain time, after three or four years. This is called *karam*. It is performed in a special hut which is called the borghar of the clan. On an appointed day the men and the women, who belong to the clan by birth, go to the borghar with their jela and *hari,* that is, the elder living male and female members of the clan, with rice, raw and cooked, meat, fish and vegetables. The hari cooks them and a part of this food is offered to the departed souls by all the senior members of the clan in a small conical basket hung in the north-west corner of the borghar. Beer is also poured into the basket. They do this for seven days after which all the things which were used by the persons who have died during the past three years as well as the basket of food offered to them, are carried to the cremation ground in the same manner as a dead body is and placed on a pyre built as for cremation. They are left there ; but things used by the dead persons may be taken by the gyatis.

Each clan does it according to its convenience for the general well-being of the village and protection from diseases.

A clan may perform annually a sacrificial rite for warding off evil influences that come in the form of epidemic. A goat or fowls are killed on the unfrequented outskirts of the village. The blood is offered on a small pile of rice kept on a banana

leaf to the spirits, who are supposed to have caused the malady. The jela or any senior male born in the clan does it. while the ojha keeps on chanting. The women do not go to the place of this ritual. They wait in the borghar of their clan. The men cook the meat and offer first to the spirits, a meal with rice and vegetable. Then they carry the food to the borghar where the women are waiting. Here beer and food are offered on a leaf to the dead and the rest is taken by all.

Although, the religion of the Lalungs is not characterised by any cult or tenet, it has not escaped messianic influence of the saint Sankardeva who propounded a non-idolatrous vaishnavism that has become the predominant religious faith in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Lalungs of Nambor have absorbed it in their own way. Every year on a certain day in April or May they perform a ceremony that shows the form this messianic belief has assumed among them. They call it *borsewa* or offering of the great oblation to god.

This ceremony is at present conducted by a person who goes by the name of deka-bhakat. According to the villagers, there was formerly a bhakat or devotee who was punctilious in the observance of the rules of borsewa. These are very difficult to follow. He was known as bura-bhakat that is old devotee. He was pure in his mind and act. He refrained from ploughing. He used to put on wooden sandals and as he walked he took care not to tread on any living being. He was a celibate. When he wied it was not possible to find another of such a saintly character. The successor could not submit to such a rigorous conduct and has been allowed to marry, plough and do other things forbidden to those in his profession. Hence he is merely deka-bhakat that is not as mature and pure as the old devotee.

The elders of the village select a Sunday in which the borsewa is performed in the house of the deka-bhakat. The articles for the ritual, namely, pig, fowls, vegetables, rice and mustard oil, are bought with the money contributed by the villagers. In the evening, they assemble in the courtyard of the deka-bhakat and enter his borghar when all have arrived. They bring beer and uncooked rice with them. Young girls also come and pound rice and dress vegetables for the ritual cooking. Inside the borghar on the side of wall between the dining apartment and the kitchen, a harp, a conch and a bowl of beer are offered on a mat to the bura-bhakat. The deka-

bhakat takes his seat on another mat to the left. The other persons sit close to the wall on either side as one enters through the front door in the east. In the centre of the room, the devotee makes a fire with bamboo. A little away from it towards the door on the east he places a mustard-oil lamp. A basket of rice and a bundle of bamboo splits are kept on a banana leaf and a pot of rice is kept near it.

The food which is offered on this occasion is prepared in the room, by four *sajanis*. They take bamboo from the basket and light them at the lamp and cook.

Any one, whether he is a Lalung or an outsider, may come in and join the ceremony. But nobody may secretly watch it through the walls from outside. If one does, one will become blind, it is believed.

The lamp represents the god as no idol is worshipped by the Sankardevaites. As the sajanis cook they sing songs which tell that they are cooking the food for all who are assembled there. After the fire has been carried to the hearth one of the cooks serves beer. First of all he takes a bowl and hands it to the deka-bhakat, who holds it and invites two other from those present to drink with him from the same bowl. In this way, the drink is taken by three persons from the same pot at each serving. This is done to impress that there is no commensality of eating on this occasion. As the drink is served songs are sung describing the life and the activities of Sankardeva in which the deka-bhakat takes the lead.

After this the pig and the fowls which have been bought are taken inside the borghar for sacrifice. The fowl is killed by throttling and the pig is laid on the ground and suffocated to death with its neck pressed with a bamboo. No blood is split in consequence.

At this time same god is prayed to take the souls of the sacrificed pig and fowl with him to heaven. Their meat is cooked by the sajanis. The deka-bhakat and all the persons sitting inside the dining room keep on singing in praise of Sankardeva. When the ritual food is ready it is offered to the holy spirit of *Bura-dangoria,* a popular name of the god Mahadeva.

By the side of the burning lamp in the borghar two sticks are set up by a sajani and a piece of cotton yarn, soaked in mustard oil, is tied at the top of each. These are lighted at the hanging ends and as they burn a pot of rice beer and the

cooked food is served to the Bura-dangoria in front of the sticks on a banana leaf. When the threads have completely burnt out, the food and the rice beer are taken away, and distributed to all. After feasting, a sajani pours a few drop of mustard-oil on everyone's head. This ends the ceremony.

The intercourse of the Lalungs with the supernatural world of the deities is characterized by a desire to secure their livelihood, specially agriculture. There is a systematic order of rationalisation in which the deities are propitiated. Ritual is the means to establish a link with the deities but it is not an end by itself. The importance of the priest is that he is specialized in the technicalities and knows the incantations. Naturally he makes them into a secret of trade and is very wary in letting others into it. This enables him to monopolize the intermediation between them and the gods so that supernatural help can be sought only through him.

No deity is represented in human or any other form but their characters and spiritual identities are distinct. In many rituals, the deity called *Bagh Raja* occupies the first ritual altar on the left. But that is no indication of his heirarchical status among the deities. He is thought of as the lord (*raja*) of the jungle (*bon*) ; and as such is also called, *Bon Raja*. Deification of the tiger is not an exclusive feature of the Lalung religion. A similar belief is also found in Bengal where the tiger is propitiated in human form.

Although the tiger king is accorded the same ritual treatment along with the other deities, it is not given any ceremonial farewell after the agricultural ceremonies. The idea is that its spirit comes from the jungle to take the offerings given on the altar and goes back by itself to its natural abode. Like the other deities it does not stay till the *Sunikerana phujah* in the village bachelors' hall. Though deified, the animal remains distinct conceptually.

This aspect of the tiger king is, however, qualitatively different from the totemistic beliefs of certain Lalung clans, namely, Mithi and Hukai. But in spite of this there is no religious sanction against killing of tigers by the other clans when it attacks human beings or the live-stock. Totemism is a part of Lalung religion, but it is a separate kind of belief which has no relation with the ritualism or sacerdotal practices.

The precedence given to the tiger king in *Chongkong* and *Tusuma*, the first and the last of the agricultural ceremonies

perhaps shows the anxiety or concern to pacify it, lest it comes out of the jungle and kills people as they work in the fields outside the village. In the *Washirawane,* there is no altar for the tiger king as the ceremony is not connected with agriculture.

During other ceremonies, the spirit of the tiger cannot enter the settlement area as they are performed at a fixed place near the paddy field, and as it is not given any ceremonial farewell it goes back from there to the jungle. In treatment and conception, the deified entity of the tiger is different from those of the other deities, but at the same time it is given first altar, on two important agricultural ceremonies.

The god Mahadeva has a prominent place in the supernatural world of the Lalungs. He is thought of as the presiding deity of the borghars and the bachelors' hall of the village. Whenever any Lalung takes rice beer, he lets fall on the ground a few drops in the name of *pa Mahadeva* that is the father Mahadeva. He is the protector of crops and human beings. He taught the Lalungs to till and plough land, gave them implements and showed them how to raise crops. These aspects of Mahadeva are symbolically demonstrated in kheljawa and Chongkong ceremonies. Almost the same conception about him is prevalent among the hill Lalungs.

The *Jol-thol devata* who is the presiding deity of land and water is benevolent like Mahadeva. His importance is indicated by his ceremonial altar between the latter and the Chari-bhai Chari-kora.

Although Chari-bhai Chari-kora is given the last alter he occupies as important a place in the supernatural world as Mahadeva in all the agricultural ceremonies. In the spring festival, he is the only deity. In Washirawane, and *Sagra mechawa,* he is represented symbolically by a post or sapling of *modar* tree. In the village of Nambor formally there used to be such a modar tree and the last dances of *Sagramechewa* were danced under it. But now only a branch fetched from the jungle is planted. It appears that Chari-bhai Chari-kora is the presiding deity of the bamboo grove. Chari-bhai, an Assamese word means literally four brothers. It is probable that, instead of referring to a single deity, Chari-bhai Chari-kora is the collective name for a group of four deities who are always associated together. But the Lalungs of Nambor consider it as the name of one single deity.

The conception of the Lalungs about their deities constitutes a separate domain in itself. It is separate from their attitude towards malevolent spirits. The village magician is entrusted to deal with the latter when they are ritually invoked as on the occasion of the *Malthakur pujah.*

Suni perhaps is the most powerful of all the malevolent spirits. He is associated with the deities only at the time of ceremonial farewell.

The Lalungs of Nambor use Assamese words for naming the deities described here except last part of the name of Chari-bhai Chari-kora. The Bagh Raja apparently has got a Lalung name also ; for sometimes it is referred to as *Khor Raja.* The word raja which distinguishes him as the lord of the jungle is perhaps a later addition from Assamese. Similarly for Mahadeva they have their own name, Hojaidew. Jol-thol and the chari-bhai are Assames words.

Influence of Assamese culture on Lalung religion has come through the preachings of Sankardeva. It is a historical fact. A section of the Naga tribes follows the tenets of Sankardeva and there is no doubt that it also spread among other plains tribes such as the Kacharis and the Miris. The Lalungs of Nambor have accepted certain tenets of Sankardeva, namely, prayers and songs as formless means of propitiation of god. But they have made their own adjustments, to fit in with their conception of Mahadeva their main deity. Animal sacrifice and offering of blood are foreign or even abhorrent to the faith of Sankardeva. But here they sacrifice pigs and fowls to Mahadeva in borsewa, when he is invoked by a different name, Bura dangoria. It is interesting to note that Mahadeva is popularly known among the rural communities all over Assam by this name. He is also known as Bura-bhangara, for his liking of bhang and indigenous drink of hemp. It is most probably one of the original religious conceptions of the Lalungs and other Bodo tribes of Assam, through which they are linked with the greater Indian tradition and culture.

NOTES

1. This setting-up of an emblem, preferably a bamboo one, has a parallel in a larger Indian context. Every year a pole is set-up in honour of the God Indra—the god of rain. The ceremony is known as *Indra-maha*—the festival of Indra and the pole is called *Indra-dhvaja*—the banner of Indra. It is said that the first banner was

raised on the occasion of the first dramatic performance by the sage Bharata, to which it was a contribution by Indra:

प्रीतस्तु प्रथमं शक्रो दत्तवान् स्वध्वजं शुभम ॥ ६१

But latter the daityas created obstruction and

जजरी कृतदेहांस्तानकरोज् जर्जरेण सः ।

And so the pole came to be known as *jajara*. It has to be set-up before any folk dramatic performance and has to be specially propitiated. It should have five sections—with five presiding deities:

शिरः पर्वस्थितौ ब्रम्हा द्वितीये शंकरस्तथा ॥ ६३
तृतीये भगवान् विस्णुअचतुर्थे स्कन्द एव च ।
पंचमे च महानागाः शेषवासुकितक्षकाः ॥ ६४
एवं विघ्नविनाशाय स्थापिता जर्जरे सुराः ।

Specifications of the pole are:

जर्जरे दतकाष्ठे च संप्रवक्षयामि लक्षणम् ।
श्वेतभूम्यां तु यो जातः पुष्यनक्षत्रजस्तथा ॥ १६४
माहेन्द्रे तु ध्वजे कार्यं लक्षणं विश्वकर्मणा ।
तेषामन्यतमे कार्य जर्जरं दारूकमंतः ॥ १६५
अथवा वृक्षजातस्य प्ररोहो वापि जर्जरः ।
वेणुरेव भवेच्छेस्तस्य वक्ष्यामि लक्षणम् ॥ १६६
प्रमाणतो ङंगुलानां तु शतमष्टोत्तरं भवेत् ।
पंचपर्व चतुर्ग्रन्थिस्तालमात्रस्तथैव च ॥ १६७
स्थूलग्रन्थिर्न कर्तव्यो न शाखी न च कीटवान् ।
न क्रिमिक्षतपर्वा च न हीनस्त्वन्य-वेणुभिः ॥ १६८
अक्तं तु मधुसर्पिर्भ्यां माल्यधूपपुरस्कृतम् ।
उपास्य विधिवद वेणुं गृहणीयाज् जर्जरं प्रति ॥ १६९
यो विधिर्यः क्रमचैव माहेन्द्रे यो विधिः स्मृतः ।
स जर्जरस्य कर्तव्यः पुण्यवेणु समाश्रयः ॥ १७०
भवेद् वे दीर्घपर्वा तु तनुपर्वा तथैव च ।
पर्वानुमण्ष्लं चैव पुण्यवेणुः प्रकीर्तितः ॥ १७१

(adhyaya—XXIII)

These are from the Natyas' astra of Bharata Chapters I, II and XXIII. For rites of propitiation see Chapter III, Slokas II-13, 75-83. Bharata -Natya -S'astra (Bombay 1929)

Sarasvati-Kantha-bharana of Bhojadeva refers to the pole and Indra festival in S'loka 314 of the fifth *pariccheda*, which reads:

सच्चं चअ क्दठमओ सुरणाहो
जेण हलिह-घूआए।
हत्थेहिँ कमल-दल-कोमलेहिँ
छित्तो ण पल्लविओ ॥

This (pole of) the king of gods must really be wooden as it does not burst into blossom at the touch of the soft-handed peasant maiden.

For further information the inquisitive reader is referred to the Samarangana-sutra-dhara by Shri Bhoja-deva.

2. The function of the *ojha* seems to be like that of the Brahman in the Vedic sacrifice.

"Now the four chief priests who were occupied with the Srauta sacrifices are: (1) The Hotar or "caller," who recites the verses (rcah) of the hymns in order to praise the gods and invite them to the sacrifice; (2) the Udgatar or "singer," who accompanies the preparation and presentation of the sacrifices, especially of Soma libations, with chants (saman); (3) the Adhvaryu or "executor of the sacrifice," who performs all the sacrificial acts, at the same time muttering the prose prayers and sacrifice formulae (yajus), and (4) the Brahman or high priest, whose office it is to protect the sacrifice from harm. For every sacred act, therefore, every sacrifice too is, according to the Indian view, exposed to a certain amount of danger; if an act is not performed exactly in accordance with the ritualistic prescription, if a spell or a prayer formula is not spoken correctly, or if a melody is sung incorrectly, then the sacred act may bring destruction upon the originator of the sacrifice. Therefore, the Brahman sits in the south of the place of sacrifice, in order to protect the sacrifice: the south being the haunt of the god of death, and the haunt from which the demons hostile to the sacrifice, threaten the people. He follows the course of the whole sacrifice mentally, and as soon as he notices the least mistake in a sacrificial act, in a recitation or in a chant, he must, by pronouncing sacred words, make good the harm. Therefore the Brahman is called in a old text "the best physician among the sacrificial priests." (Winternitz, M. *A History of Indian Literature.* English translation by Mrs. S. Ketkar, Vol. I. p. 161. Calcutta 1922).

3. *Sagra*—Hindi *sagara,* all or whole?

4. The branch or *phang* of the *modar* may also represent the deity, a certain occasion during the festival of *Sagramechewa,*

APPENDIX I

TABLE OF KIN TERMS

Relationship	Kin term	Reciprocal	Address
F	Pa	Sa	Pa
M	Wai	Sa	Wai
Z, D	Sa	Pa, Wai	Sajo
H	Sui	Si	
EB, FeBZ, FeSZ, MeBZ, MeSZ (m.s.)	Khai	Kojal	
EB, FeBZ, FeSZ, MeBZ, MeSZ (w.s.)	Khai (older than ego)	Nanau	
ES, FeBD, FeSD, MeBD, MeSD (m.s.)	Pai	Kojal	
ES, FeBD, FeSD, MeBD, MeSD (w.s.)	Pai (older than ego)	Nanau	
YBW, MyBZW (m.s.)	Kojal	Chathal	
	Pahari	baro	
EBW, MeBZW (m.s.)	Pahari	Chathal	
YBW, MyZW (w.s.)	Kojal	Pai	
	Pahari		
EBW, MeZW (w.s.)	Pahari	Nanau	
YSH, MySDH, FyBDH, FySDH (w.s.)	Changoi	Nanisa	Wai
DH, YBDH, YSDH (w.s.)	Changoi	Niw	Wai
DH, YBDH, YSDH (m.s.)	Changoi	Hu	Pa
YSH, MySDH, YSDH, FySDH (m.s.)	Kabi	Chalarou	
FyBDH (m.s.)	Changoi	Niw	
ESH, MeBDH, ESDH, FeBDH, FeSDH	Punsi	Sali	
FBW, MSZW	Pawi	Sali	
SZ, BZ, BD, SD, FSZZ, FSZD, FSDZ, MBDZ, FSDD, FBZZ, FBZD, MBZZ, MBZD, MBDD, MSZZ, FZZ, MSZD, MSDD, MSDZ, FZD, MZZ (m.s.)	Pagin	Mamai	
SZ, BZ, BD, SD, MZZ, FZD, MBDZ, MBDD (w.s.)	Pagin	Ayong	
MBZZ, MBZD, MSZZ, MSZD, MSDD, MSDZ, FSZZ, FSZD, FSDZ, FSDD, FBZZ, FBZD, FZZ (w.s.)	Pagin	Asi	
MM, FFW (m.s.)	Abi	Chu	
MM, FFW (w.s.)	Abi	Abi	
MMH, FF (m.s.)	Ajo	Chu	
MMH, FF (w.s.)	Ajo	Abi	
MB	Momai	Pagin	
MBW, FBW	Aui	Pagin	
FB	Dadai	Pagin	
FS, MS	Asi	Pagin	
FSH, MSH	Asa	Pagin	
BZW, SZW, ZW, FyBZW, FySZW (m.s.)	Pahari	Hu	Pa
BZU, SZW (w.s.)	Pahari	Niw	Wai
ZW (w.s.)	Pahari	Wai	Wai
FyBZW, FySZW (w.s.)	Pahari	Pai	

Note: E, e—elder; Y, y—younger; m.s.—man speaking; w.s.—woman speaking.

APPENDIX II

TABLE SHOWING MARRIAGE CLANS OF THE SIBLINGS OF NAMBOR

Clan of mother	Clan of father	Clan of marriage	Number of marriage
Hukai	Amchong	Buma (2), Sonjol, Songran, Amjur	5
Madur	Amchong	Mosrong, Buma, Ladur, Amchong	4
Ladur	Amchong	Buma, Maslai, Amphi	3
Amchong	Kholar	Ladur, Amchi, Amchong*	3
Phang-chong	Amchong	Mithi	1
Mosrong	Amchong	Muni (2)	2
Ladur	Sonjol	Buma	1
Amchong	Ladur	Mikir, Amchong*, Songran	3
Ladur	Kholar	Amchong (2), Mithi	3
Ladur	Hukai	Amchong	1
Buma	Madur	Amchi, Amchong	2
Buma	Ladur	Khorai	1
Amchong	Madur	Buma	1
Sonjol	Amchong	Kush	1
Maslai	Sonjol	Amchong	1
Songran	Ladur	Amchong	1
Amchong	Mithi	Amchong (2)*	2
Ladur	Mithi	Mosrong	1
Khorai	Buma	Amchong	1
Amchong	Khorai	Ladur	1
Hukai	Ladur	Amchong (2)	2
Sonjol	Hukai	Amphi	1
Hukai	Songran	Madur	1
Hukai	Kholar	Amphi	1
Songran	Kholar	Amchong	1
Ladur	Khargol	Kholar, Khargol*	2
		Total	46

*The clans belong to different villages.

APPENDIX III

CLANWISE RESIDENCE PATTERN IN TWO GENERATIONS OF NAMBOR

Clan	First generation				Second generation			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	V	U	V	U	V	U	V	U
Amchong	14	2	7	3	16	2	7	2
Madur	5	0	0	0	3	0	2	1
Ladur	6	1	4	3	6	1	5	0
Khargol	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Buma	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Kholar	6	3	2	2	1	0	1	0
Hukai	1	1	1	2	0	0	2	0
Songran	2	1	5	3	0	0	1	0
Sonjol	6	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Mithi	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Khorai	1	0	2	1	1	0	3	1
Amphi	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Maslai	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
	46	11	28	15	30	3	21	4
	46%	11%	28%	15%	51.7%	5.1%	36.2%	6.8%

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